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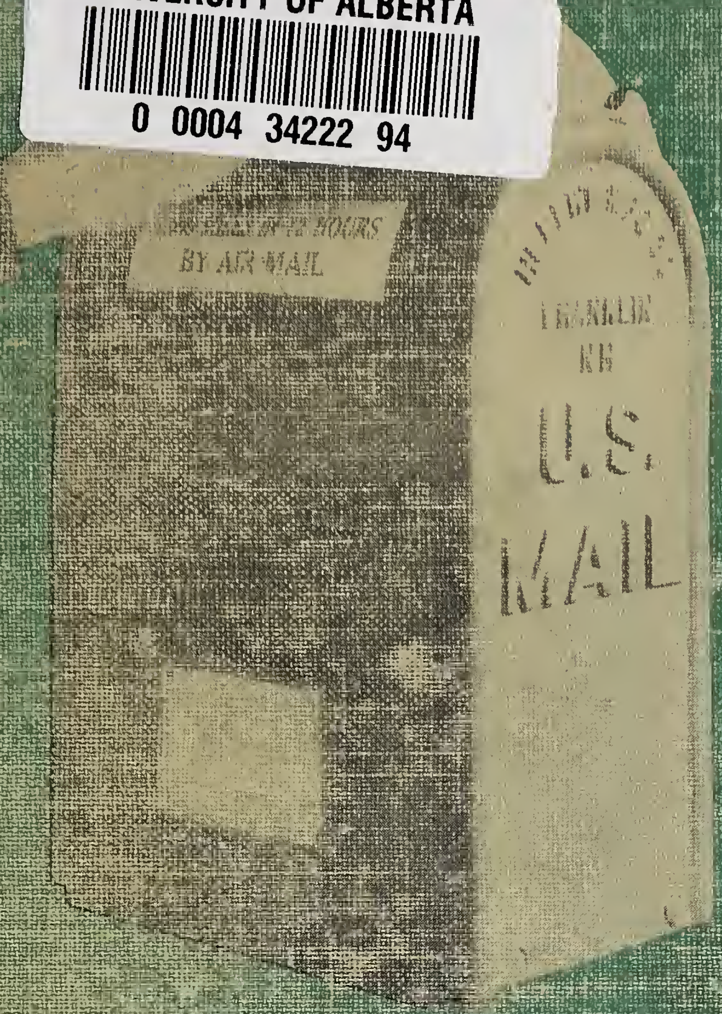

THE MAIL COMES THROUGH

By CHARLES GILBERT HALL

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The Mail Comes Through

THE *Macmillan* COMPANY

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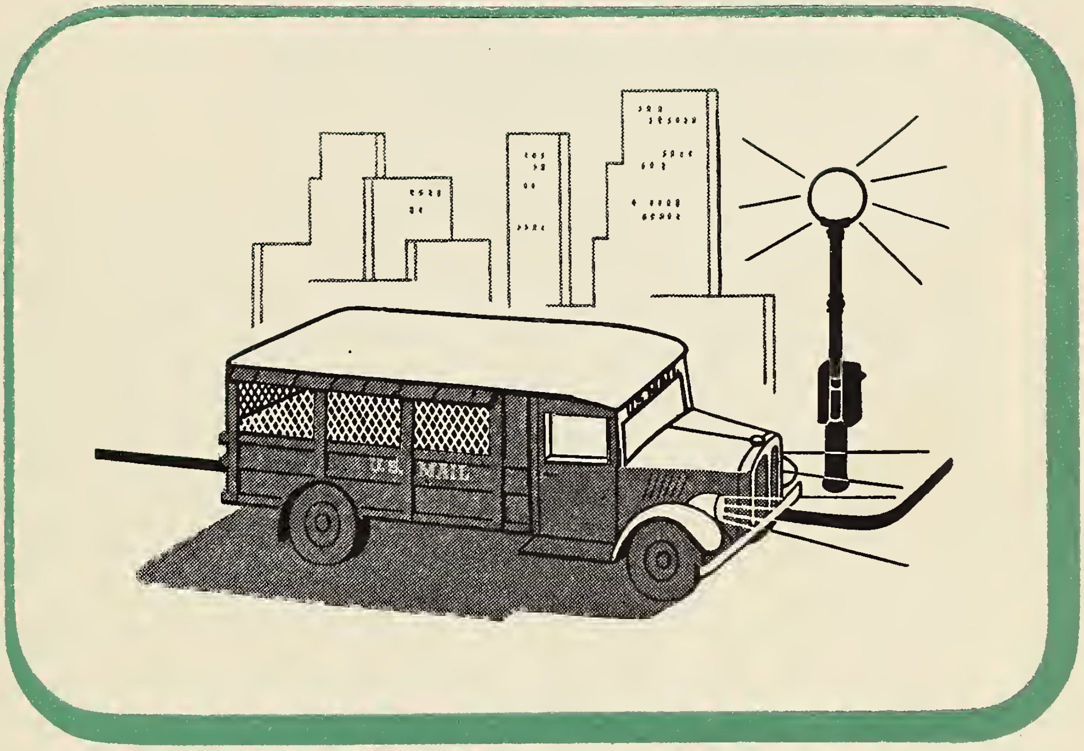
BY

CHARLES GILBERT HALL



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The Macmillan Company

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Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.

—Herodotus

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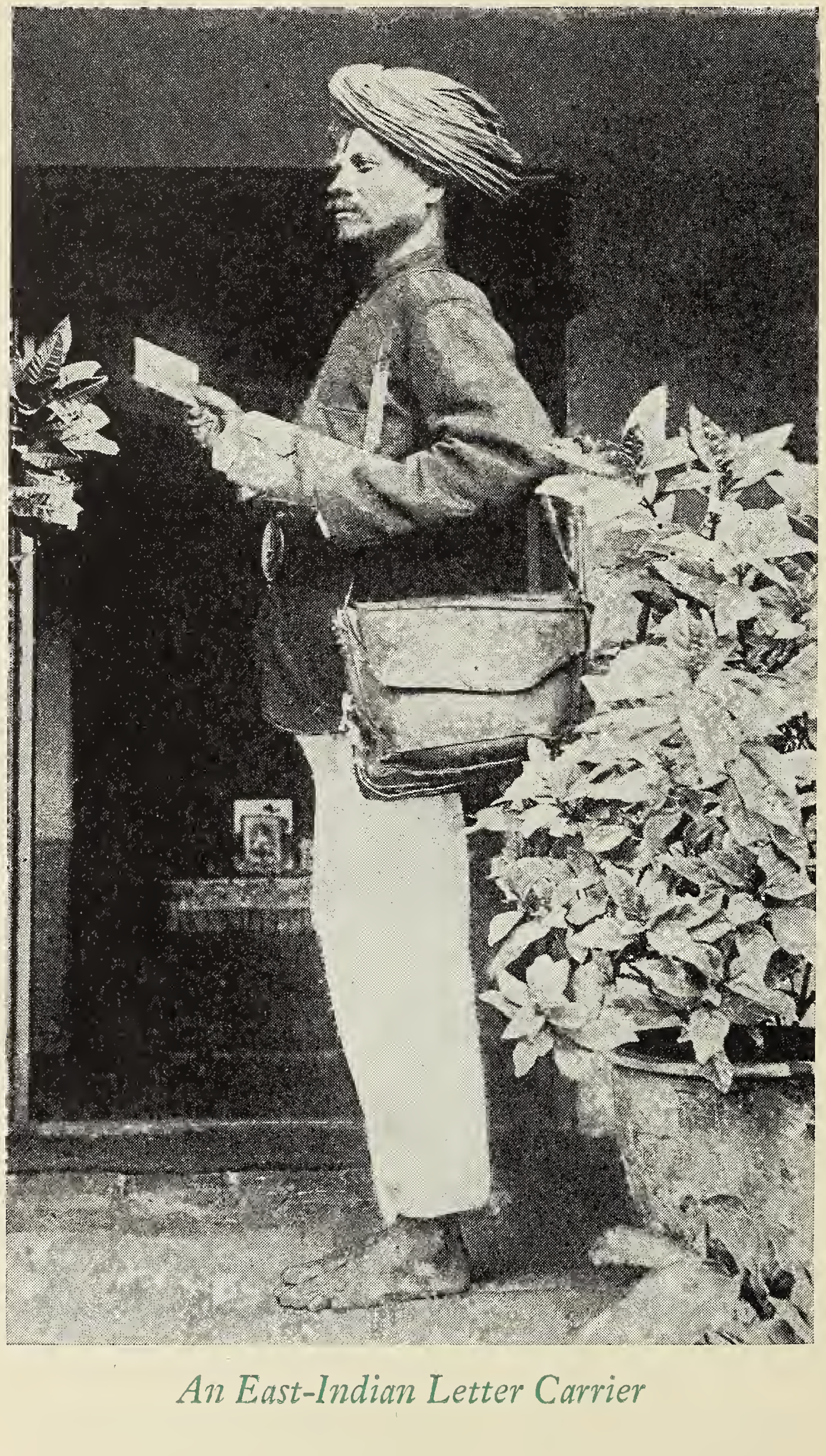


An East-Indian Letter Carrier

1

The Little Brown Man with Bells

THIS book is about carrying the mails. What can a book say about carrying mail, do you ask? Don't we all get our mail without difficulty? Don't all of us hear from our friends and write to our relatives whenever we like? What is there to say about the mails? There is this to say:

Since the day when the first man learned to read and write, the mails have been an important part of men's lives. Whether by stagecoach or by pony express, by airplane or on snowshoes, by camel or by railroad train; whether in far Alaska or near at home, on India's broad plains or on a frozen canal in Holland, the mail has always been able to keep us in touch with the outside world, and to make us feel more like neighbors.

I remember how it was when I was a boy. A long, white road ran through the town, across the river, up the hill, and past orchards and farm lands; as far as the eye could reach, it rose and fell, a distant ribbon of white.

Along its dusty length moved wagons, slow-drawn and heavy with freight, and great droves of cattle, and barefoot farmer girls. At evening, if you were watching closely, down the far hills a distant object would glide like a small cloud of dust. You would feel your heart beat faster as it drew near, until at last, with a mighty clatter of hoofs and grinding of wheels, the tumbling, lumbering old mail coach would come into town. The outside passengers, looking very travel-wise after their trip, would dismount; the driver, perched high beside the mailbags, would throw down the reins; the tired horses would droop their heads. The mail was in once more!

Men have always thrilled a little to see the mail come in, whether by stagecoach or on sailing ships, by swift horsemen or on airplanes. We call these messengers our *lines of communication.* Through them the world is bound into one great fellowship that neither wars nor any other disaster can wholly break.

That was the way it was in the little town I've been talking about. There was news from Uncle Henry, a message from Aunt Hannah, a letter from cousin William, and a package from Brother Bill. One man in the village took a daily paper, which was quite a luxury in those days. When the excitement of arrival had died down, he would open it, the men would gather round him, he would read to them, their faces would brighten, and they would all listen, hungry for news! There was a message from the President, and news about the king; there was talk about war and battles in lands we had never seen. There was word about our governor, and talk about new laws, and little messages from all over the world—endless stories borne of the mails!

It is the same almost everywhere. The slow-moving postman in some Scottish hill town, the gray-clad letter carrier at your own door, the dapper pilot on the mail plane, the rider on the pony express—they all catch our imagination. They bring us a whiff of the world outside!

The Postmaster General's Official Flag

Such, in far away India, is the *little brown man with the bells*. While you and I read this, he is trotting, trotting his little jog gait down some hidden jungle path. He does not wear much clothes—only a cotton loin cloth and a little white cotton coat; about his head is a red turban, or *puggree;* and in his hand is a spear on the end of which jingle little bells. He's a brave and loyal little man. Bells keep off the evil spirits, he says, and the equally evil beasts. Man-eating tigers and lurking leopards are about, but he keeps up his endless, tireless jog, carrying the Indian mails.

Faithful, as all postmen should be, he comes, bringing joy, or comfort, or sorrow—word from a child in distant England whose father waits, anxious, at an outpost in the Indian hills; word from a mother in some far-off land whose son, weary and homesick, waits to hear from her; word for the white *sahibs* (masters) who have come out to India, exiles, as you might say, from home. Oh, great is the little brown man with the bells! And great are his kind in every land! Sometimes he swims swollen rivers, and sometimes he finds himself cut off from human kind. Sometimes the wild beasts get him. But he is faithful to the mails.

Kipling, who knew the jungle people well, wrote of him:

> In the name of the Empress of India, make way,
> Oh, Lords of the Jungle, wherever you roam.
> The woods are astir at the break of the day—
> We exiles are waiting for letters from home.

There's a speck on the hillside, a dot on the road—
A jingle of bells on the footpath below;
There's a scuffle above in the monkey's abode—
The world is awake and the clouds are aglow,
For the great Sun himself must attend to the hail:
In the name of the Empress, the Overland Mail.

Can't you almost see the little brown man? And hear the crunch of stone as he comes up the hill?

Close in our homes, our friends about us, how necessary to our happiness are the mails and those who serve them! They labor that the whole world may be more nearly one. They labor and plan continually that we may know one another better, and talk with one another through the many miles that so often lie between us.

2

How It All Began

MEN began to feel the need of some sort of post office a good many centuries ago. And they used strange means for sending messages. Paper, pen, and ink seem quite necessary to us; we take them as a matter of course. But before they came into use many devices long since discarded were made use of by the ancients.

The great Greek historian, Herodotus, tells us that in the olden days, when it was necessary to send a message which for some reason was quite private and confidential, the king sometimes had the head of a trusty messenger shaved clean, and the letter written on his scalp.

His hair was then allowed to grow until the message was covered; then the messenger started on his way. When he arrived at his destination, his head was again shaved, and there was the message, quite plain to read!

Josephus, too, tells of messages inscribed on men's backs, and of Jewish war messages carried by men who were disguised as animals. In fact, the ancient Jews knew quite a bit about letter writing and about posts and the mails. You know about Job, of course—that patient man in the Bible who lost all he had. He says: "My days are swifter than a post; they flee away." That was twenty-six hundred years ago. When someone wrote to King Artaxerxes about the Jews, he replied: "The letter which ye sent unto me hath been plainly read before me," much as we would today write to our friends: "Yours of the 11th received and contents noted." Josephus, the historian, says the letters King Solomon wrote to King Hiram of Tyre about the building of the temple were still kept at Tyre a thousand years afterward.

Various means were used for writing letters in those days. The Assyrians wrote on clay, and their letters were in the form of small clay bricks. They knew, too, how to make little clay envelopes. Both letters and envelopes are today preserved in many of our museums, to be read after thousands of years. The ancient Egyptians used papyrus; and some of the earlier peoples wrote on stone. The Romans used parchment and papyrus, with a thick ink made of lampblack, not unlike printer's ink. Colored inks, too, were popular, purple being reserved for the use of the Emperor. The Romans also used wax tablets, making impressions on the soft surface with a metal stylus. There is evidence that they sometimes used a stylus of soft lead, the forerunner of our lead pencils. King Cyrus of the Persians sent messages to his officers at distant points that were written or scratched on tablets or spearheads of bronze or brass. None of these materials were very convenient. But as the Middle Ages drew to a close, when Richard the Lionhearted led the Crusaders to the Holy Land, about 1190 A.D., he and his people learned from the Arabs at Ascalon how to make paper. This art had come to the Arabs from the Chinese, who not only made paper from linen and cotton, but also from the bark of trees.

An Assyrian Clay Tablet

From Left to Right: Belgium, Japan, Prussia, and Austria

With this discovery, the use of written messages increased rapidly. This increase, together with the more extensive travel that arose as a result of the Crusades, led to a rapid development of post offices, postal systems, and mails.

Not that this question of posts was not already an ancient one. King Cyrus, with his blades of brass on which messages were scratched, had established a system of swift messengers whose fame has come down to the present day. The Assyrians, too, had post offices; and even the Egyptians knew about posts. In Europe the Roman posts had been famous; later, Marco Polo was to bring tales from the dream realms of Far Cathay of the great postal system of Kublai Khan, with its ten thousand post stations and thousands of swift horsemen.

All these, however, were what might be called private lines. For no one but the king and his officers was permitted to use them. In fact it

Old Stamps from England, France, Turkey, and Bavaria

was not until the time of Queen Elizabeth that the world knew what it was to have a post office open for the use of all; and even then, the good queen limited such use rather severely.

There was some reason for this, too. General learning was still so limited that but few people could either read or write. This being true, only the learned few had any use whatever for postal facilities.

3

What News from Rome?

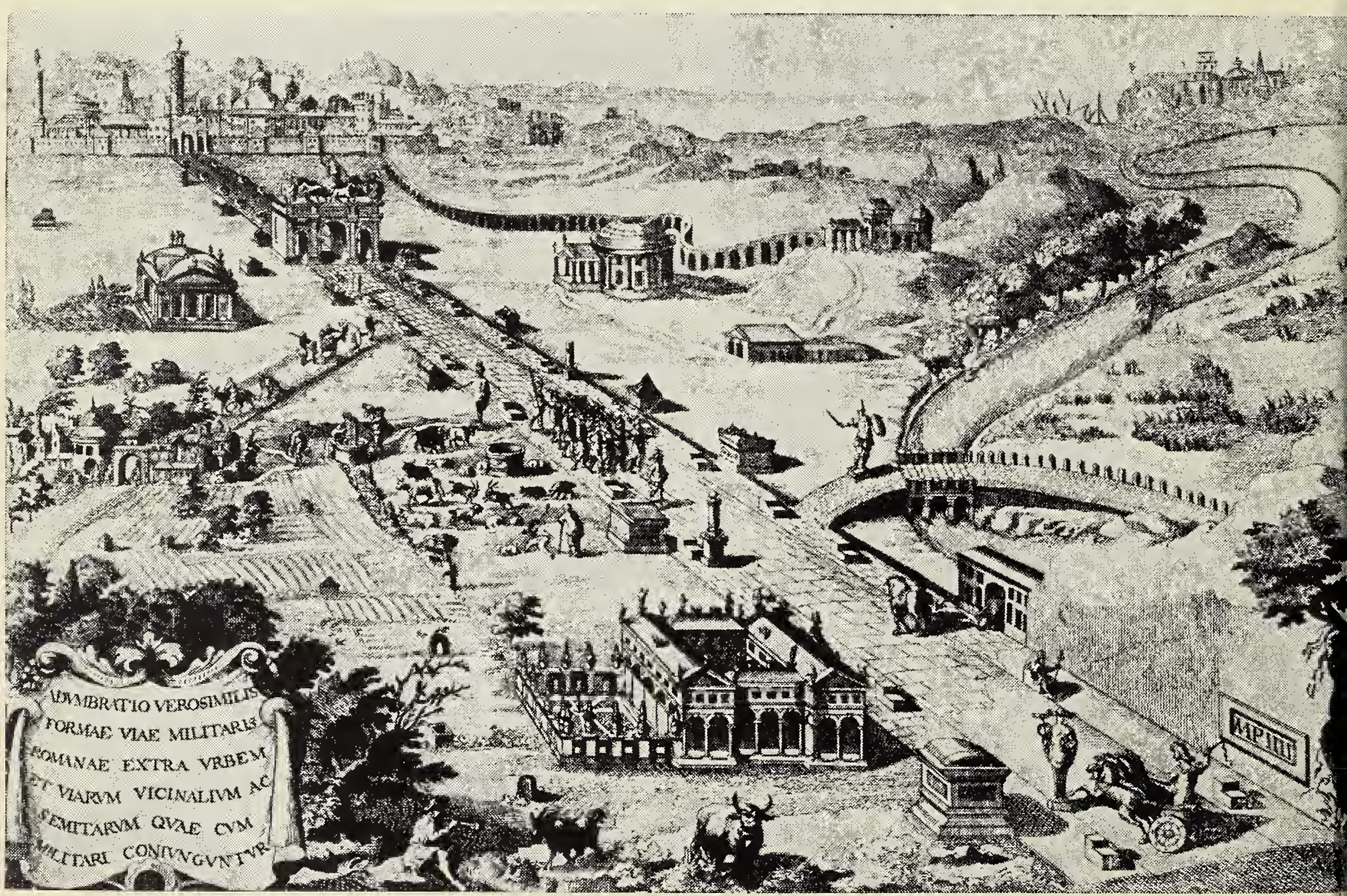
THE village road described in our first chapter, winding past orchards and farmlands and over hills, was much like the roads of olden times. Lined with trees, running through forests, with old stone bridges over babbling brooks, in a way it was something like the ancient Roman roads.

But in one way it was different. Over it passed farmers and town folks, cattle and crops; milestones marked the way; but not a single soldier was to be seen.

In Rome there were always soldiers. The roads were made for them.

The stern tramp of the Roman legions, the glint of arms, the glance of the sun on the Roman eagles, marked every high road.

These roads went straight from one Roman city to another. If a mountain was in the way, the road went over it or through it. If a river was to be crossed, a great, bold, stone-arched bridge was flung across it. North as far as York, south as far as Antioch and Jerusalem, east to the Danube and west into Spain, ran these roads. Some of them still exist. In England parts of the Stane Street, running to London from the Channel ports, are still in use today; traces of this and other Roman roads in Britain are still clearly visible.



A Roman Military Road

At the Forum, in Rome, five of these great highways started, radiating like the spokes of a wheel, reaching out to the whole civilized world of that day.

How long ago it all seems! Nineteen hundred years ago, when Christ was on earth! And some of the Roman roads are still standing! Better than we can build? You may be sure they were. We have built a good many highways since that time. And we are proud of many of them. But in some ways the Romans did better than we have ever been able to do.

The middle of the road was raised, so that the traveler looked down on the surrounding country. On the roadway a thick layer of sand, gravel, crushed rock, and cement was placed. On this foundation the builders laid great blocks of stone. Stone posts were placed to mark the miles; hence the name *post roads*. Post houses, too, were placed every five miles, and forty horses were kept at each house, where the Roman mail carrier, called a *tabellarius*, could get a fresh mount, and where he might eat and stay for the night, if need be.

This mail carrier of the olden days traveled the great Roman highways either in a chariot or on horseback. When he used a chariot, he often carried a traveling Roman official with him, to the far-flung outposts of the empire. The tabellarius made almost unbelievable speed, often covering one hundred twenty miles in a day. The historian, Gibbon, tells of Caesarius, a Roman officer of the Emperor Theodosius, who traveled from Antioch to Constantinople, seven hundred twenty-five Roman miles, in less than six days. He made one hundred sixty-five miles the first day.

The tabellarius was by no means the only traveler on the Roman roads; the Roman legions were constantly marching over them; and at intervals of fifteen or twenty miles there were *mansiones* or camps at which the legions might halt. These mansiones were duly fortified, and were so placed as to come at the end of each day's march.

The Romans built great cities, too, along these roads. There were twelve hundred of them in Gaul alone; eleven hundred ninety-three in Ancient Italy; and other cities in Northern Africa, England, Asia, and Spain. They were handsome cities, some of them, with marble theaters and gorgeous temples, public baths and ivory palaces, coliseums and stadiums. They had great aqueducts for their water supply—you can see some of these standing yet—and bridges of stone that are still in use today.

These cities were filled with public monuments and with homes of luxury. Rome, Capua, Marseilles, Bordeaux, York, London and Bath, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem—all sent their wealth to Rome. No wonder the first thing the Romans did when they conquered a province was to build roads.

From the Scottish border on the North—you will need your map now—to Jerusalem, four thousand eighty Roman miles, every Roman city had its road. The chief purpose of the Roman roads was the movement of the Roman legions. Up and down the great pavements marched thousands, endlessly moving to a new garrison or marching back to the Eternal City. For Rome was ever pushing into new country, subduing savage tribes, and enforcing Roman order and Roman law. Let the legions withdraw, and savagery was pretty sure to follow.

Thus it became necessary to establish many *lines of communication.* Orders must be given, reports made, supplies requested—all the endless routine of governmental activity. For this purpose the *cursus publicus* was organized by the Emperor Augustus. *Cursus publicus* was just another way of saying post office. Although the public was not allowed to use it, the Emperor and his officers maintained a postal service that was splendidly adapted to the needs of that day.

There is no evidence that the tabellarius ever carried private mail. But when he entered a city, he bore all the latest gossip from along the road. He knew all the latest rumors and newest changes at Rome. Citizens and soldiery alike depended upon him for their touch with the outer world.

Can you not see the long line of hard-paved highway and feel the hot sun beating down? Can you not see the tired legion plodding, plodding, every mile taking it farther away from Rome? Can you not hear the clatter of the horse's hoofs and see the post rider as he bends low? Can you not see the men's look of expectancy, and hear the hoarse soldier cry: "What news from Rome?"

Gone are the Roman legions. Long gone are the men who opened up the Roman ways. Gone is the pride of the old Imperial City. But our *lines of communication?* Never were they so strong as now. Never were they put to such good use for the benefit of man. Never were they so free to all of us; rich and poor, high and low, we are all equal in the postman's eyes.

4

Good King Charlemagne

IN TIME a terrible thing befell Rome! Hordes of savage men swept down on it along the Roman roads. Terror and panic seized the people who dwelt along the way. The legions turned homeward; a great night of darkness fell, so that the world was lost in barbarism and ignorance for a thousand years.

Of course this was not a night of darkness because the sun had set and no stars had come out; it was a night of dull ignorance, fighting, and fear, when a new race of men, strong, fierce, and masterful, fought with Rome and among themselves. When we speak of the Dark Ages, we mean that medieval age of plundering, skin-clad, warlike Vandals, Goths, and Huns, and of robber barons and constant war, that blossomed at last into the days of the noble knights and their fine adventures that we like to read about.

When the great Germanic tribes first swept west, our friend the tabellarius turned tail and put out for home. There were no more Roman mails, you may be sure. The great roads that had seemed so strong were broken and torn; the rich cities through which they passed were plundered and burned, and civilization itself was at stake. It now appeared that the Roman lines of communication had been at the very heart of things, and that without them, or without other means of communication, the world didn't seem able to keep going!

All the great Roman cities had been built on or near these Roman roads. On the roads, or near them, the world's great battles had been fought; by them the great markets had been built; beside them were the rich palaces, the lovely temples, and later on, the great monastic establishments in which the dying sparks of learning were to be preserved.

When the last legions were gone, when the great *mansiones* were broken up, when the tabellarius and his waxen tablets no longer rode out from Rome, the common people hid themselves, the cities fell into ruin, and there was little life to be seen in the desolate land.

But the Dark Ages weren't altogether dark. The new and savage men began to learn. They were an independent crowd and great lovers of liberty. When they had learned something about the Christian religion with its gentler ways, and when they were told about the Roman law and the protection it was able to give, they ceased roving, and their methods of warfare grew milder.

Now and then, too, they raised up a great king, like the mighty Charlemagne, who tried once more to bring back the fleeing tabellarius, repair the broken roads, and make peace. With all this in mind he also made a code of laws with which to rule his people; so well was this task done that his work remains today the basis for much of the Gallic code.

He also established schools. In fact, it is believed that he tried to have a school in every parish in his kingdom, which is a good deal more than you could expect from a man whose own education was such that he was unable to write, although he could read a little.

Later on, about the twelfth century, four hundred years after Charlemagne, the medieval universities sprang into being at Paris, Salamanca, Padua and Bologna. With the establishment of these universities, learning began to take on a different aspect, and scholars began to assume an attitude of inquiry, instead of being content laboriously to copy manuscripts. This led men into scientific research, and made a new demand for better means of communication between scholars in distant fields. When people began to send their sons to these schools, being much like boys of today, the young men began to worry not about lessons, or marks, or careful conduct; but about *how to get money from home!*

There was no way in the world by which this could be done. Father couldn't go all the way to Paris or Padua to bring money to his son. The son couldn't make the trip back home; it might take him weeks. Something had to be done about it! So at the University of Paris they fixed up what they called *flying messengers* who rode post much as the Roman tabellarius had done. The boys got their money, other people wrote letters, and the king and his officers were able to communicate with one another. The postman was back again. The Dark Ages were beginning to grow light.

About this time came the Crusades. Knights and soldiers, and Peter the Hermit, and thousands of singing children packed up and marched away under the sign of the Holy Cross. Returning, they told of luxuries that no one in Europe had ever before known; trade grew as it had never grown before. Spices, incense, perfumes, precious stones, carpets, hangings, and rich cloths came from the Far East, traded for leather, tin, lead, furs, and timber. Merchants grew rich. Finding their merchandise in demand in foreign parts, they began to travel with their wares. They soon found that if they but had the means to write, much of their difficult journeying might be avoided. As the years passed on, cities grew rich. Venice, Trebizond, Genoa, and the cities of the Baltic sent out ships and trade grew still more. Travelers came home with strange tales of bold adventure in strange lands; and minstrels roamed the land singing of mighty deeds.

Learning now began to grow apace. The looms of France and Belgium began to turn out beautiful fabrics, and along the old Roman roads great monasteries grew and thrived. Brilliantly illuminated parchments recorded the deeds of men and preserved men's learning.

People now began to learn to read and write. If the knight, off to the wars, could not read, why should his lady write to him? What could the merchant do if the man who bought his cloth could not be reached unless he took his staff in hand and traveled far, to tell him what he had to say? The postman began to be quite busy!

Now he carried something new. King Cyrus had written on blades of bronze. The Assyrians had used letters and envelopes of clay. The Egyptians had made their strange hieroglyphs on papyrus, and the monks had used sheepskin scrolls. The Roman messenger had carried dainty tablets of wax. But today the postman had something different! He carried *paper* for the first time.

That famous traveler, Marco Polo, wandering far to the East to the court of Kublai Khan, had returned to Venice to tell of many wondrous things. But none so clearly affected the world as the tales he told of how the Khan maintained a great system of posts. Ten thousand stations, Marco thought, where horses waited and messengers came

A Medieval Postman—Letters for Milady

and went, were to be found in the Khan's dominions. Marco, too, had seen how the workers of the Khan, from the inner bark of the mulberry tree, had made paper on which the Khan's money was printed. Thus he verified what Richard the Lionhearted had learned at Ascalon: that paper could be made to take the place of parchment, papyrus, and all the other difficult and expensive writing materials the world had known up to that time.

Traveling far in search of trade and adventure, over the Black Sea and through ancient, magic Trebizond, our merchants and travelers

A Post Office in the Time of Louis XIV had found the Chinese. And the Chinese taught us about two strange new things. One of them was gunpowder, with which to destroy. The other was paper, with which to spread knowledge and happiness. Now letters would be easier to write.

Books, too, would be easier to make, for in Germany a man named Gutenberg had discovered how to print from movable metal type. The world was about to enter a new era. Without Gutenberg's wonderful discovery we would have but little use for the post office today. With it, the postman was now to come into his own!

5

"Haste, Post! Haste!"

THE development of the post office and the safe handling of mails in England were matters of slow growth. Yet it was to England that the nations finally had to look for the ways in which safety and speed could be established.

It was Charles Dickens who, in 1851, after steel pens had been invented, wrote that "insofar as the perfection of materials for writing is concerned, we may have little more to hope for." Yet in less than thirty years the typewriter came into use, while today few of us indeed do not know what a fountain pen is, and how convenient it is

From Left to Right: England, France, Italy, Switzerland
These Are Stamps Now in Use in Some European Countries.

compared with Mr. Dickens' steel pen. This same satisfied attitude toward things in the past to a great extent governed the English post office and made improvement slow.

It was during the reign of Queen Elizabeth that the mails were opened in a limited way to others than the Queen and her councilors. This was a remarkably important advance. Shakespeare was writing plays; books had begun to appear; America had been discovered and England was starting her American colonies; the spirit of adventure was strong; and English ships were sailing the Seven Seas. Never before had it been so important that the lines of communication should be improved.

Methods, however, changed but slowly. Some years later, Charles I appointed Thomas Withering as "postmaster of England for foreign parts," and Withering, in 1635, proposed to make the domestic serv-

Denmark, Finland, Czechoslovakia, and Sweden

ice self-supporting, with day and night service on each of the great post roads. He proposed that the post riders make a minimum of one hundred twenty miles a day, and fixed uniform charges for letters, according to the distance carried.

In 1680 Charles II authorized William Dockwra to establish what was known as the *London Penny Post*. This was a most remarkable improvement. Dockwra established four hundred fifty stations in various retail shops, where letters could be mailed to any point in London or its suburbs for a penny. Packages of the weight of ten pounds or money to the amount of ten pounds would also be delivered for the same price. A system of messengers called at each station for mail every hour of the day, and deliveries were made as many as six or eight times a day.

This service, it must be remembered, extended only to London and its environs. Mail for any place outside the city was handled by the government post. This government post, like that in America at a later time, was greatly hampered by the system of collecting postage at the end of the route, instead of having it prepaid. No one liked to pay rather heavy dues on a letter or package only to find that it contained nothing whatever of value. For many a practical joker thought it rare fun to mail to some distant friend a bulky package with nothing of value inside of it.

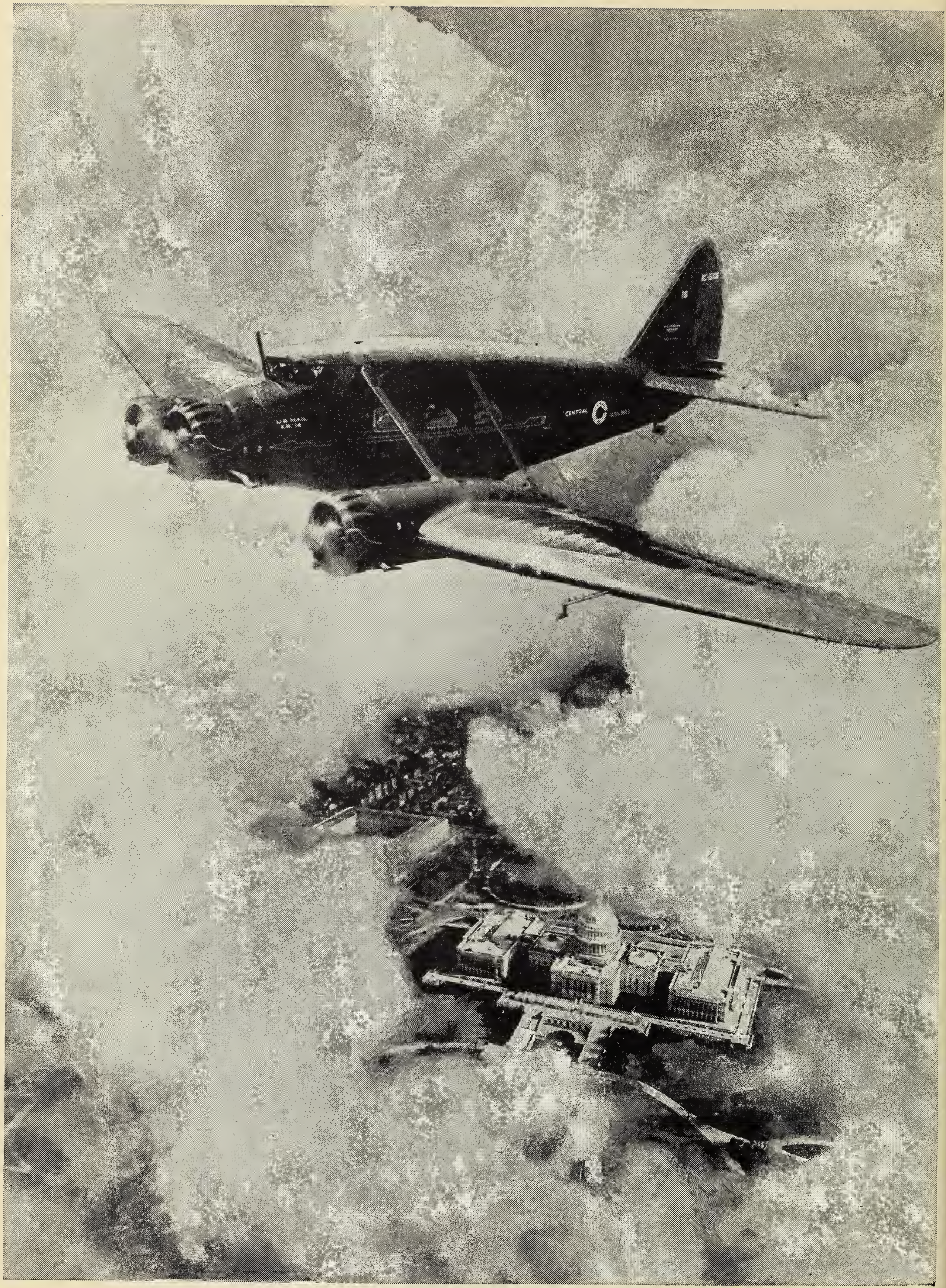
One of the strange things about the British post office during all the

Early American Stagecoach at the Canadian Border years was that it still depended for the transportation of the mails on an antiquated system of postboys. Elizabeth's postal service to which we have referred had been limited to the British Isles. Letters addressed to anyone in the colonies beyond the seas still had to be entrusted to merchants or to ships' captains. For domestic service, Elizabeth created a system of postboys, with *posts,* or stations, at which the boys stopped for fresh horses or to eat or sleep. Each station was in charge of a postmaster. Unlike the postmaster of today, he had nothing whatever to do with the mails. His task was to look after the boys and to keep a supply of fresh horses on hand for remounts.

The service was very slow and uncertain. The boys were dilatory; the roads were often deep with mud. The boys loafed, drank, and gossiped at wayside taverns; the letters entrusted to their care were likely to be opened and read, lost, or destroyed.

The boys might have done better had it not been for the discouragement of the extremely bad roads. As late as Cromwell's time it was said that his troops at one time captured eight hundred horses all of which were helplessly stuck in the mud. One writer tells that it was no unusual thing to see as many as six heavy oxen struggling to pull an English squire to church in his heavy coach.

It was little wonder that with roads deep in mud, the heavy bag of mail strapped to his bent back, and sleet or snow matted in his stiffened hair, the postboy was tempted to loaf beside the cheerful fire of a wayside inn. But there were other reasons why the boys were slow.



Wings Over Washington

The postmasters had but little control over them; they loafed also when the weather was fine. It became the custom for those who wanted their mail delivered promptly to write boldly across the face of the address the words: *Haste, Post! Haste!*

Roads in England improved later on; by 1675 the stagecoach had come into such general use that there was talk of having the mails carried by this means, thus doing away with the postboys. In fact, it was said that the coaches were twice as speedy as the boys; for that reason it soon became the habit of many people to pay the coach driver or guard to look after their letters for them. The government found it necessary to forbid this and laid down the ruling that only the government could carry letters for pay. They must be mailed at the post office, just as our government and all other governments require today.

Meanwhile stagecoaches were frowned upon by many English people as a useless luxury. Those who rode in them, it was said, grew indolent and were unable to endure the frost, snow, and rain which every Englishman should be able to put up with. Stagecoaches made men so soft that they were no longer able to endure the occasional lodging in the open fields that every well-seasoned traveler should be taught to expect.

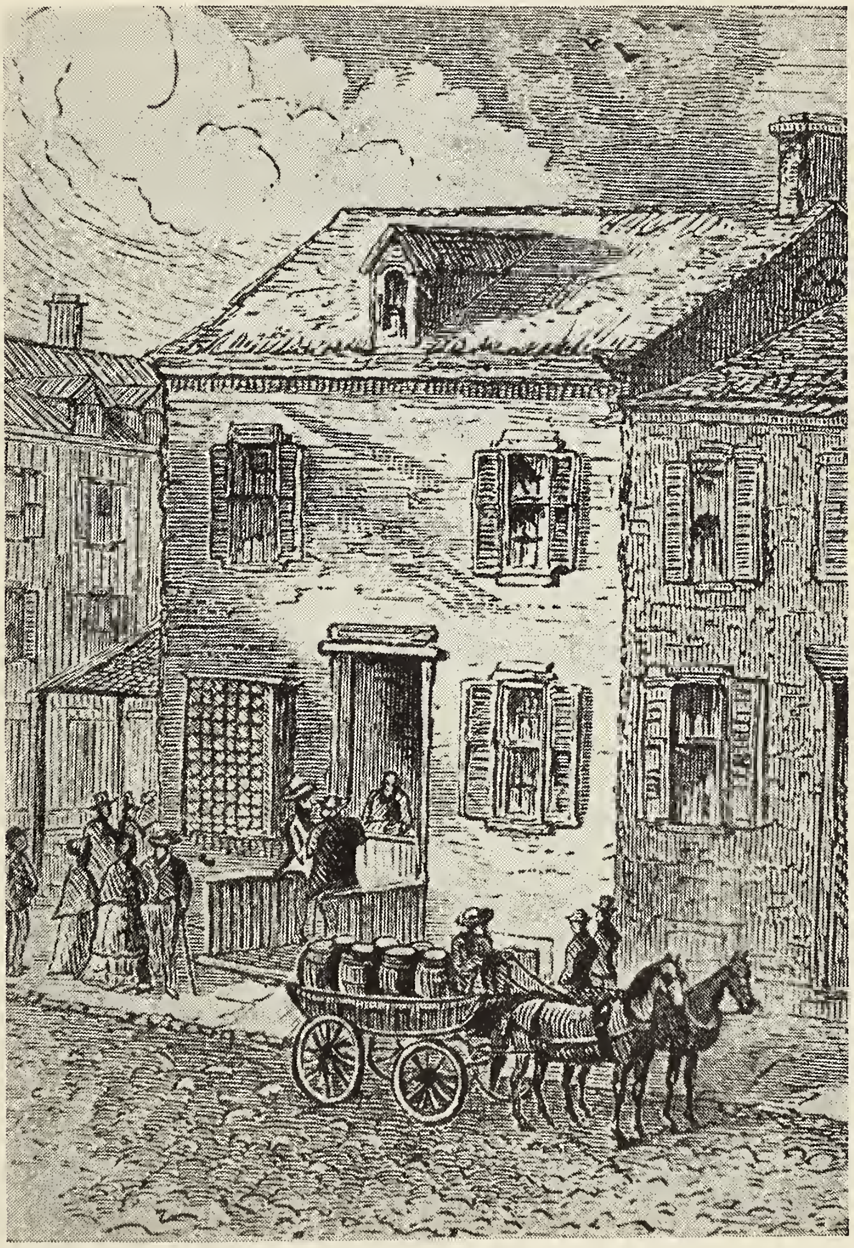
It was not until 1784 that William Pitt, England's prime minister, amid a good deal of opposition, ordered the postboys done away with and appointed the coaches to carry the mails. By this time some fine highways, such as the Great Northern Post Road, had been built; the gay flourish of the guard's bugle, the rush and dash of the lively horses, the warm light of the tavern fire, the fat landlord, and the welcome home gave zest to this enjoyable means of travel.

At this time, highwaymen were bold and numerous, and coach and mails were likely to be held up on some lonely stretch of road. The guard, with his bell-mouthed flintlock beside him, sat directly over the locked lid of the boot in which the mail was carried, and no passenger might ride beside him. But in spite of the guard in his scarlet livery and in spite of bragging travelers, the highwayman was quite likely to get what he called for when the critical time came.

The first railways did not appear in England until forty years after the postboys disappeared. In 1830 the Liverpool and Manchester Railroad, recently built by George Stephenson, carried the mails of the adjacent district; but as that was the only railroad in England and only about thirty miles long, the stages continued to hold their own for a long while.

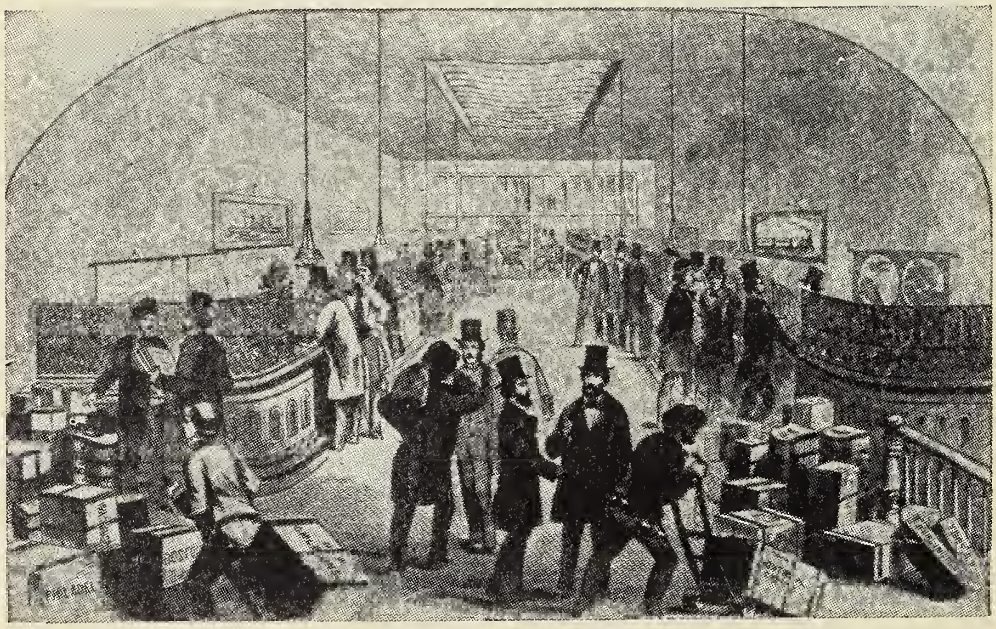
There was no lack of proposals for more rapid movement of the mails. Proposals were made for carrying them in balloons. Something not unlike our present day telegraph was suggested, only it was to consist of wires stretched between tall pillars, or church steeples, with a tin case rolling over the wire on little wheels, and a small endless wire attached by which to keep the case moving.

It was about this time—1837—that Rowland Hill, then Postmaster General of Great Britain, introduced the use of prepaid postage and of postage stamps. This he followed up by an act of Parliament that fixed a rate for universal penny postage and offered a prize for the best plan for putting the stamps into use. By this act, a letter could be mailed to any part of the United Kingdom for a penny, an innovation that remains in effect to this day. His plan was adopted only after years of bitter wrangling, and it cut deeply into the postal revenues. In fact



The New York Post Office a Century Ago these did not recover sufficiently to equal the revenue under the old plan until 1875, thirty-five years after penny postage went into effect. For it must be borne in mind that under the old plan, before the letter could be forwarded, the postmaster weighed it, computed the distance the letter was to travel, and marked the amount of the postage to be collected in the corner where we now place the stamp. It often ran as high as a shilling or more.

In America the use of postage stamps was quite unknown until the year 1847. Reasons for their late adoption were the facts that the postage varied so greatly on each letter, our distances were much greater than in England, and our postage was at first charged for according to the distance the letter was carried. Thus, as long as it was the custom to collect the charges for postage from the person to whom the mail was addressed, stamps were not needed. With the change to



A New York Express Office Over Sixty Years Ago prepaid postage and a uniform rate our postal system began to grow as rapidly as that of Britain or any other country—far more rapidly, in fact, than in most of them.

6

The Postrider in America

THE first attempt at creating anything like a post office in the American colonies was in 1639, when the king ordered that all letters from overseas were to be taken to Fairbanks Tavern, in Boston. Here the landlord was authorized to make proper delivery of them, charging a penny for each letter so placed in his charge. He could also accept letters addressed to points beyond the seas, arranging with sea captains and travelers to have them delivered. No one could be very sure that his letters would arrive—certainly not sure how long they might be delayed.

Fifty-two years later, King William III gave permission to establish the first royal post office in the colonies, the grant being to Thomas Neale, Master of the Mint. The experiment did not succeed very well. Travel was beset with many difficulties; villages and towns were far apart. No large river in America had ever been bridged, and the roads were mere tracks of mud or dust. Towns and cities between which we now pass in an hour's time were a day's journey apart. Mails between New York City and Philadelphia took from four to seven days for the trip. In 1756 the *Flying Machine*, a covered wagon, with comfortable

General Post Office, London, 1870

springs for seats, to quote the advertisement, galloped off the distance in three days.

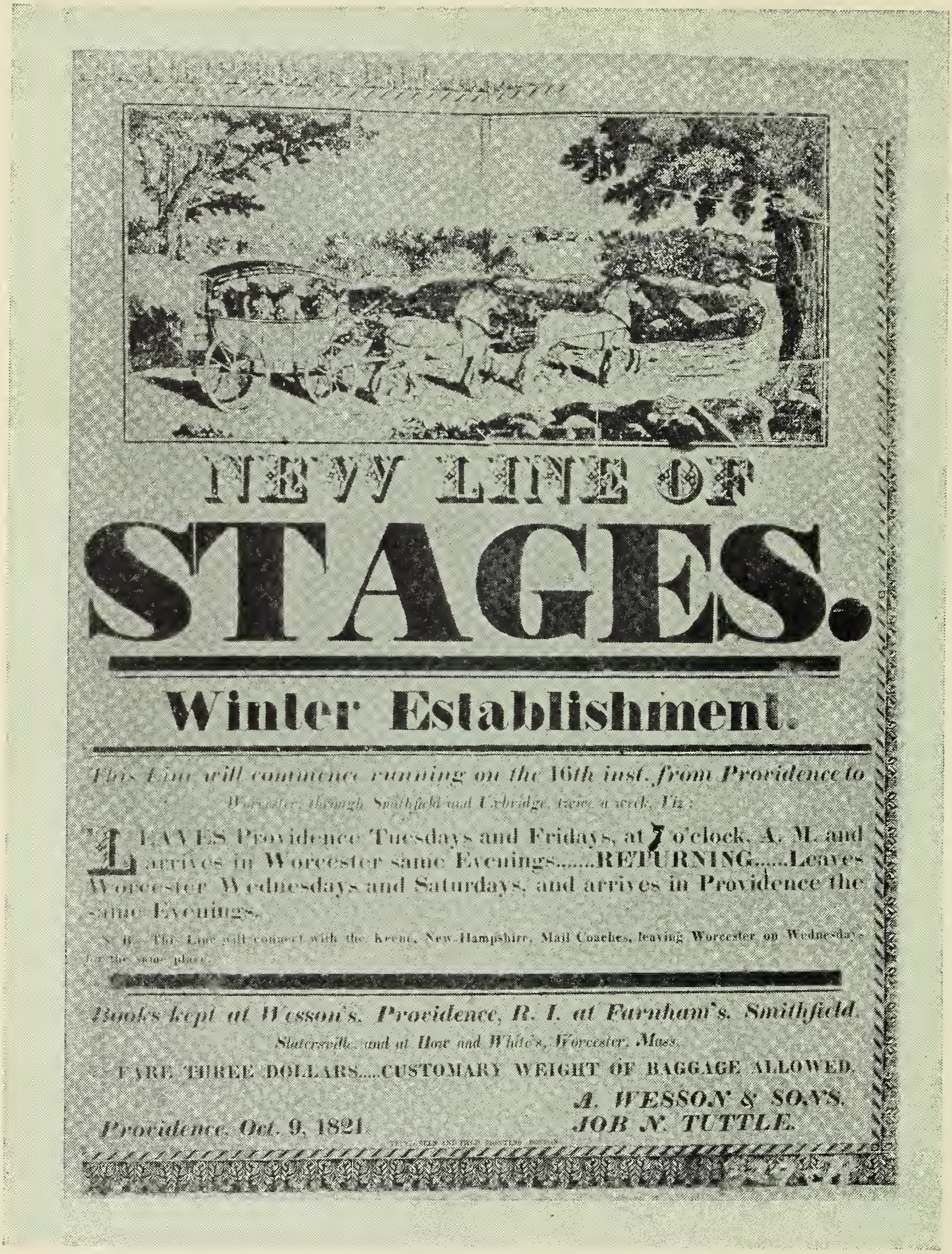
The passenger on the occasional stagecoaches that traveled between the principal cities got up at three o'clock in the morning, lighted a horn lantern and a farthing candle, traveled until ten at night, and got out whenever needed to help pry the wheels out of the mud or mend a broken axle. Even in the cities travel was difficult and the streets unlighted and unpaved. So wretched were the streets in Philadelphia, then the principal city of the colonies, that a horseman who dared to gallop over them was liable to a three-shilling fine.

At the First Post Office in San Francisco. Four Lines of People Waiting for Mail

It was no uncommon thing for a man who was about to start out, say from Charleston for New York, to look at the almanac, make his will, give a dinner to his friends, and bid them all a formal good-by. As for mail, more of it is handled in one of our larger cities in a day than was handled in the whole United States in a year. A stamp on a letter costs us so little today that we hardly give it a thought; a letter travels so fast and so far that by the next morning after we mail it we feel almost as though we had talked with the person to whom it is addressed.

In the year 1753 the British government appointed Benjamin Franklin to be Postmaster General of the colonies. He lost no time in attacking the bad conditions which he found. He learned, first of all, that the postriders were much like the postboys in England. Letters were opened and robbed; the men stopped at the wayside taverns to loaf away the hours; their horses, which each man furnished for himself, were often unfit for service; there was neither discipline nor *esprit de corps*.

He began his administration by traveling from one end of the colonies to the other on a tour of inspection. He discharged drunken and dishonest riders, stopped the habit of opening letters, made the men shorten their time on the road, erected milestones to mark the distances, and completely broke up the practice of carrying mail on which no postage had been paid. Being a newspaper publisher himself, he admitted newspapers to the mails. By the time the colonies began



NEW LINE OF STAGES.

Winter Establishment.

This Line will commence running on the 16th inst. from Providence to Worcester, through Smithfield and Uxbridge, twice a week, Viz:

LEAVES Providence Tuesdays and Fridays, at 7 o'clock, A. M. and arrives in Worcester same Evenings......RETURNING.....Leaves Worcester Wednesdays and Saturdays, and arrives in Providence the same Evenings.

N. B. This Line will connect with the Keene, New-Hampshire, Mail Coaches, leaving Worcester on Wednesdays for the same place.

Books kept at Wesson's, Providence, R. I. at Farnham's, Smithfield, Slatersville, and at Howe and White's, Worcester, Mass.

FARE THREE DOLLARS....CUSTOMARY WEIGHT OF BAGGAGE ALLOWED.

A. WESSON & SONS,
JOB N. TUTTLE.

Providence, Oct. 9, 1821.

the War for Independence the post office was for the first time actually making a profit. What was more, the people were quite content with the way in which mail was being handled.

It was not until better roads had begun to be built that stagecoaches began to run and the mail could be handled by them. In fact, it must be remembered that there wasn't much mail in these early days, and that in 1789 there were only seventy-five post offices in the whole United States, where there are almost fifty thousand today. By 1840, four thousand miles of railroad had been built, and seven million people had moved west of the Allegheny Mountains. This meant that the postal service had to be extended. By 1844 the Oregon Trail was crowded with emigrants, and by 1849 gold had been discovered in California. The work that had been begun by Franklin was now to be carried on by his successors. It must grow as the country grew.

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7

A Chapter of Firsts

THE story of the mails is one long story of *Firsts!* There was the first time that the Roman horseman set out with messages for the Emperor; and before that, the first trip the horsemen made with King Cyrus's blades of brass. There were the first postman in Merrie England and the first postage stamp. There were the day when the first envelope appeared and the first trip of the Pony Express. Most of these developments, that now seem so matter-of-fact to us, appeared to be miraculous a hundred or more years ago. But as the uses grew to which the post office may be put, this whole chapter of *Firsts* has helped to make history and to aid civilization to an extent that we do not always realize.

Learning too many dates is sometimes quite a nuisance. Yet dates are important in helping us realize how the events that have influenced our lives first took shape. Here is a table that will give you an idea of how the post office first got under way. You needn't learn these dates, of course; but they will give you an idea of when each step in postal growth was taken. Most of them, you will notice, were in your father's time, or at least within the memory of your grandfather. Which just goes to show how rapidly things have changed.

Here they are:

"FIRSTS" at the Post Office

FIRST	Post Office in America—Massachusetts	1639
FIRST	Postage Stamps—France	1653
FIRST	Postal Service between the American Colonies	1692
FIRST	Mail Coaches—England	1784
FIRST	Street Mail Boxes—New York City	1825
FIRST	Mail by Railway Train—England	1830
FIRST	Mail by Railway Train—United States	1834
FIRST	Railway Mail Clerk—United States	1838
FIRST	Penny Postage—England	1840
FIRST	Use of Envelopes—France	1842
FIRST	Envelopes in America	1845
FIRST	Postage Stamps in America	1847

FIRST	Overland Mail Stagecoach to Santa Fe	1849
FIRST	Registered Letters	1855
FIRST	Overland Mail Stagecoach to San Francisco	1857
FIRST	Pneumatic Mail Tubes—London	1857
FIRST	Pony Express	1860
FIRST	Night Mail by Railway Train	1860
FIRST	Free City Delivery	1863
FIRST	Universal 3-Cent Postage—United States	1864
FIRST	Post Cards in United States	1873
FIRST	White-and-gold All-mail Train—United States	1875
FIRST	Special-delivery Letters	1885
FIRST	Sorting Mail on Steamships	1890
FIRST	Rural Free Delivery—United States	1896
FIRST	Postal Savings System—United States	1910
FIRST	Air Mail—England	1911
FIRST	Parcel Post—United States	1912
FIRST	Air Mail—United States	1918
FIRST	Air Mail Across American Continent	1920
FIRST	Air Mail Across the Pacific Ocean	1936

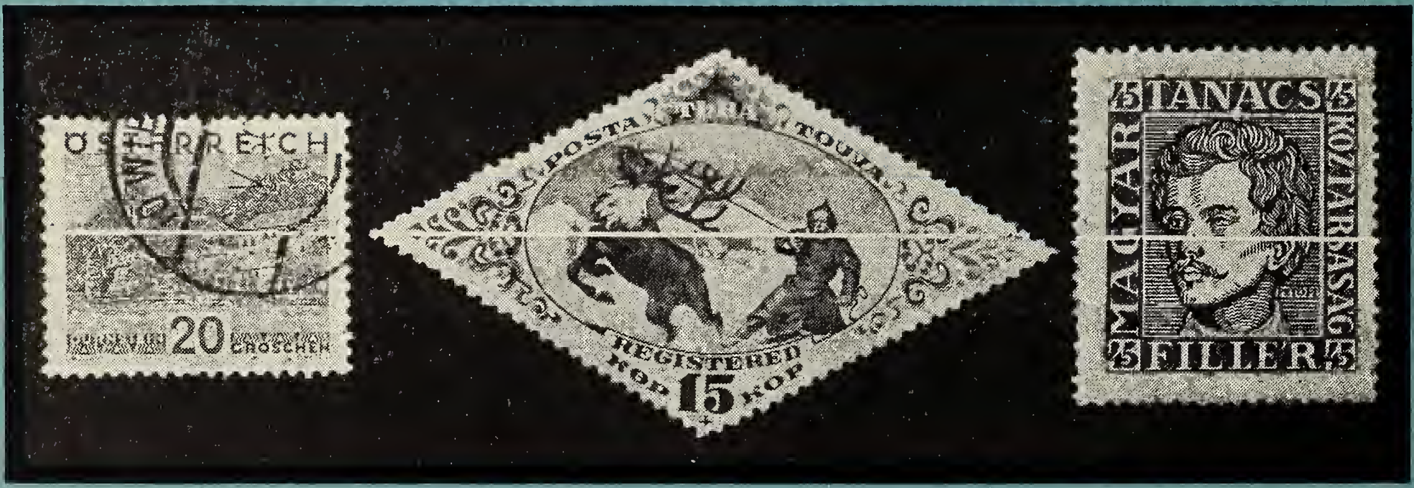
This doesn't tell the whole story, by any means. The dates do not picture to our mind all the difficulties that led to each step. The first time mail was carried in the United States by railroad train was in 1834.

The first railway in this country had then been built only four years. That meant that in 1834 practically all of the mail still traveled by stagecoach, steamboat, or on the slow-moving canal packets about which so much was being said at that time. The stagecoach was the most widely used of these, and until about 1860 it remained the chief means of communication between the rapidly growing towns. Every country post office in America gets its mail promptly today, but a hundred years ago even the largest cities received slow and uncertain service. Letters addressed to out-of-the-way towns or hamlets might be a month or even more on the road.

The change to railroads was very slow, due in part to the fact that many towns were not reached by rail, and in part to the fact that the trains were still notoriously slow and uncertain. Even when more railroads had been built, the trains were liable to be wrecked and the mail with which they had been entrusted, lost or destroyed. Often trains traveled so slowly that the stages were held by many to be the swifter. Even so, the stages too were slow, traveling as they did over very poor roads. For that reason, in 1833, express mail was established between Philadelphia and New York by means of postriders. The distance of ninety-two miles was covered in the remarkable time of six hours. Horses were changed every five miles in order to make this speed, seventy-two horses being used each day and the government paying a dollar for each mile run by each horse.

In 1837 fifteen hundred miles of railway had been built. The postmaster general paid $350.00 to have the president's annual message conveyed from Washington to New York by rail. It left Washington at noon, and reached New York the next morning at 4:00 o'clock—two hundred thirty miles at fourteen and one-half miles an hour.

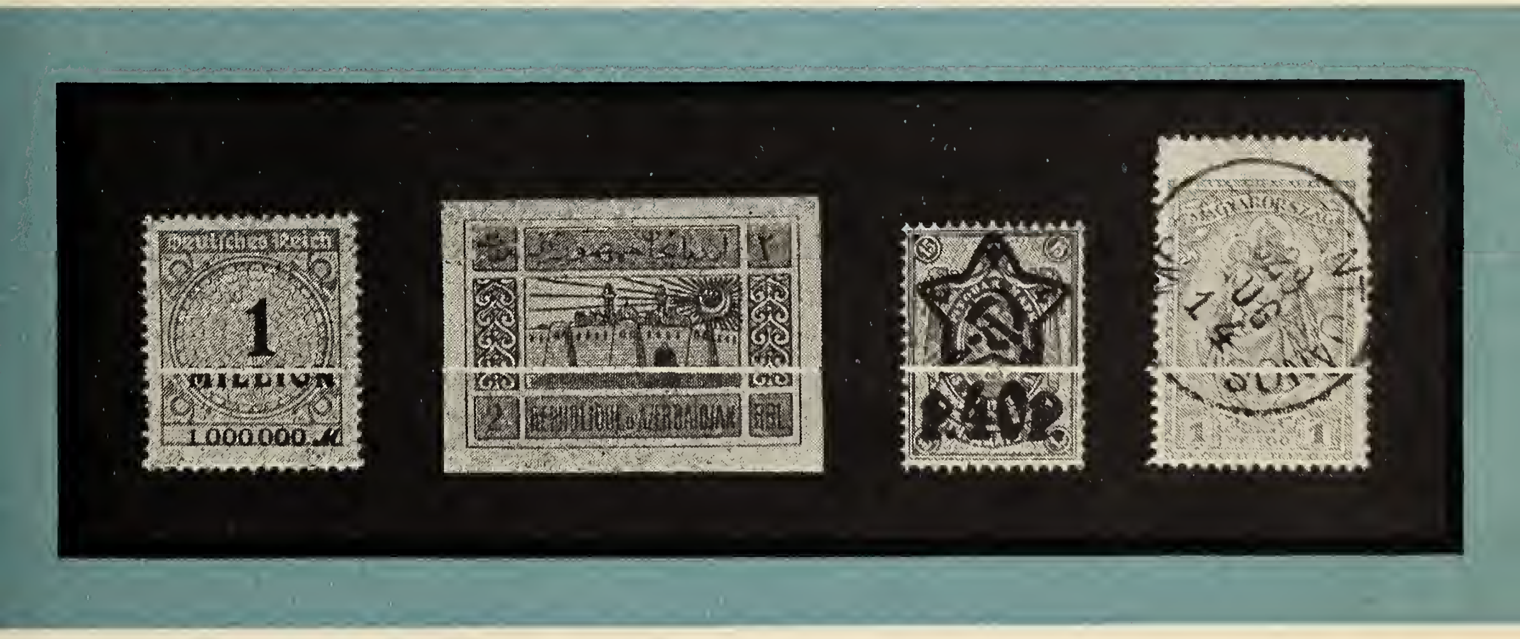
As the use of the fast-growing railways to carry mail increased, it must be borne in mind that what we call universal postage, by which a letter may be carried any distance for the sum of three cents, was not yet in use. It would be thirty years before such postage was adopted. Such a thing as an envelope, without which today we would not think of sending a letter, was still unknown. Letters, in those times, were folded in a special way, the edges sealed with wax, and the address placed on the back, so that many people who are unaccustomed to the use of the mails still speak of "backing" a letter. In fact, envelopes, a French invention, were not introduced into this country until 1845; for a long time they were looked upon as a freakish invention by peo-



These Stamps Are Some Odd Shapes and Issues ple who continued to fold their letters with the ends tucked into the folds and to fasten them with wax and wafer and the old-fashioned seal.

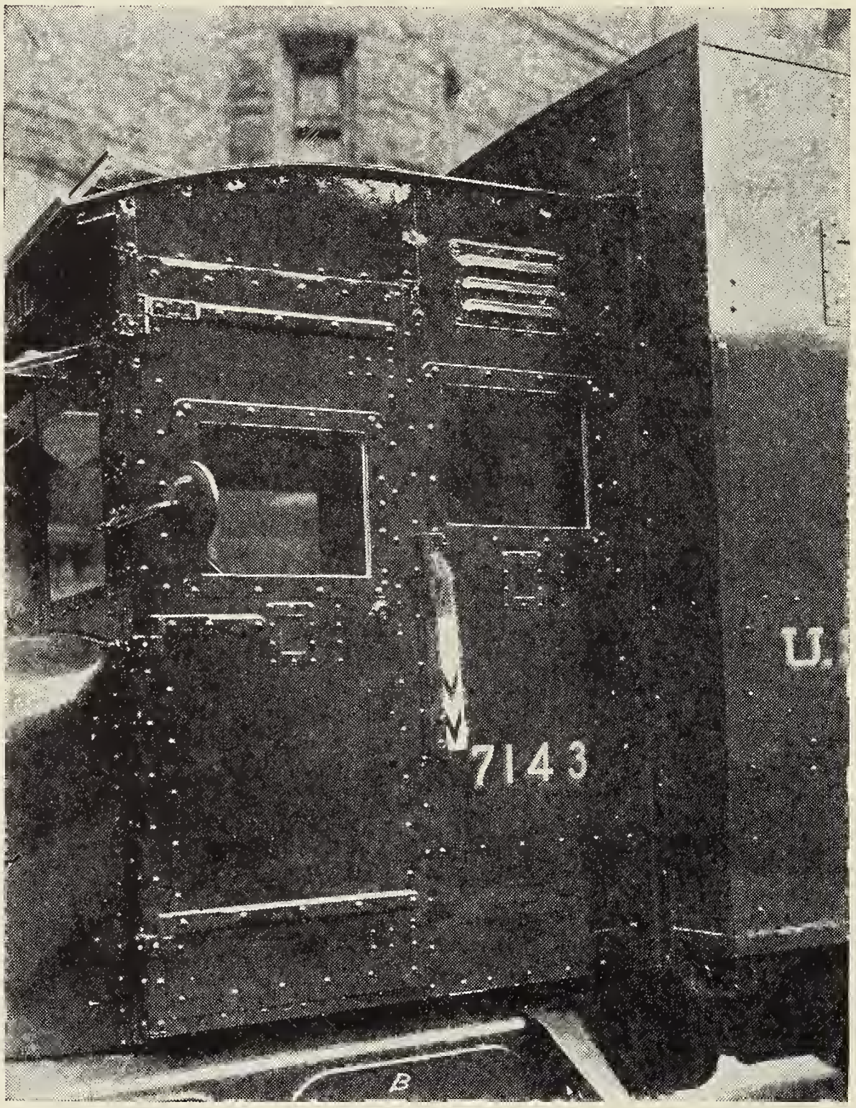
Most towns in America are now reached by the railroads; the railway train, no longer a machine, but a personality, is spoken of by the villager as *she*. Her name is *Number Seven,* or *the 5:20,* and the whole town goes down to the station to see her come in. Some places, less fortunate, are still reached only by the old-fashioned stagecoach or on horseback; to them the mail is still carried as it was a hundred years ago. To most such towns the mail now travels by "flivver" or buckboard.

But this is not always the case, especially in mountainous or thinly inhabited districts. Here the pioneering conditions of a century ago still prevail to a considerable extent. These pioneering conditions exist to a great degree in Alaska, where the dog sled carries letters, books, newspapers, magazines and parcels. In fact, it carries sledge-dog pup-



Note Imprint of Inflation on the German Stamp, and the New Seal of Russia pies, serums, kitchen stoves, and talking machines—anything needed in the far-flung villages which it serves.

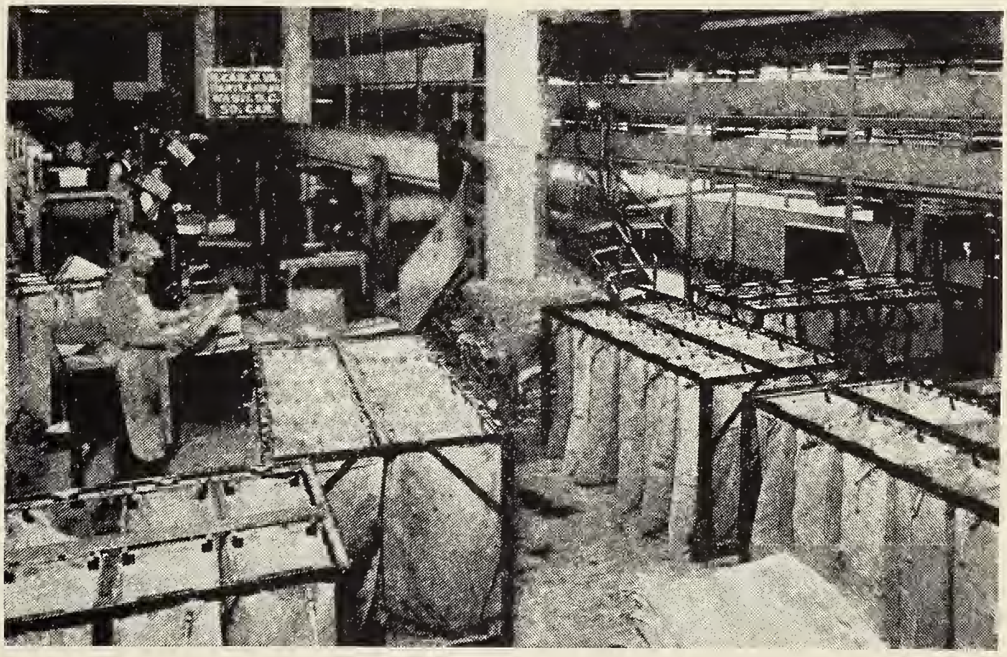
Nor is all the spirit of adventure confined to Alaska. It was but a few years ago that a twenty-two-year-old girl, in the mountain regions of Oregon, rode a mail route each week, twenty miles each way, through uninhabited country. One day, as she rode slowly around a sharp curve in the road, she found herself confronted by three bears.



A United States Mail Truck

The unexpected meeting startled the girl and scared her horse. He threw his rider and started back down the mountain at full speed. The bears, quite as surprised as she, stood their ground until the young lady, nothing daunted, caught her mount and quieted him, got back into the saddle, and rode boldly through bruin's barricade.

Sometimes it falls to the lot of the carrier of the mails to show an example of endurance. In Johnson County, Wyoming, between Buffalo and Ten Sleep, the snows are sometimes pretty deep. In the face of a bad storm the carrier set out one day from Buffalo. After going some distance, his pack horses gave out. He put the mail on a toboggan, and a pair of snowshoes on himself, but at the end of fifteen miles the shoes gave out. He made for a cabin twelve miles distant, where he could find food and shelter. He was five days getting there, most of the way



Distributing Parcel Post Packages in a Large Post Office on his hands and knees. Here he rested three days and then went on. In a week he reached Ten Sleep with the mail he had worked so hard to deliver.

Then there was Danny, on the Cimarron River, in Kansas. At Dodge City, his bay mare galloping down the dusty street, he cried, "Git out o' the way of the United States mail!"

The bystanders gathered round him as he paused. "Arapahoes are out, Danny," they told him. "Better rest yerself and not resk your old bones."

"I ain't skeert," was his answer, and he went on through with the mail.

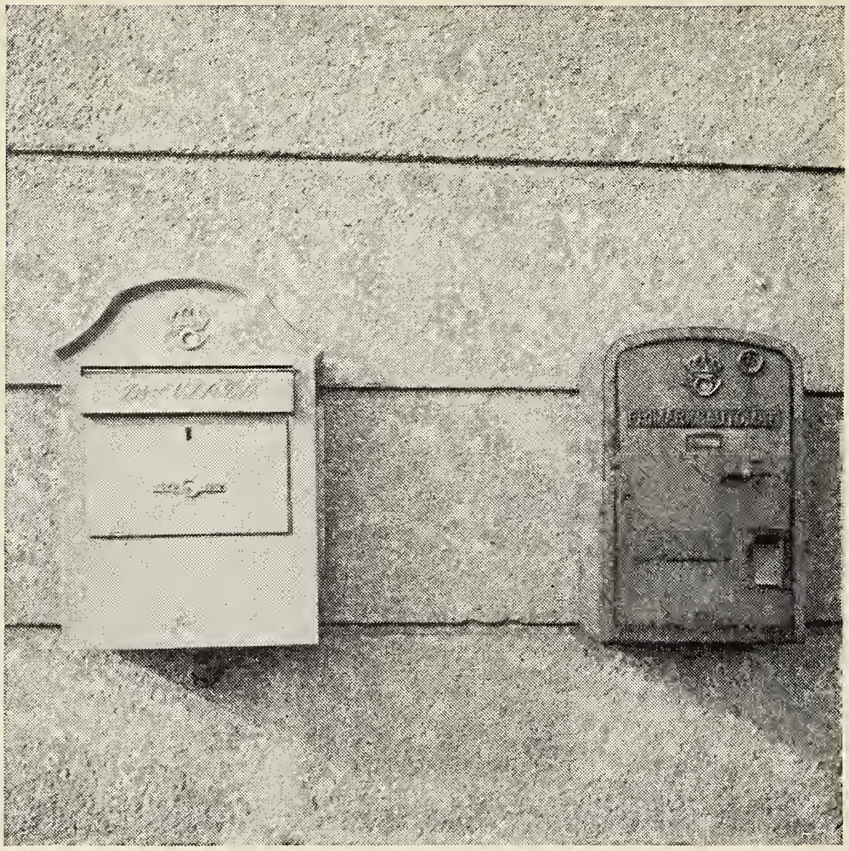
In Alaska Where Dog Sleds Carry the Mail

This chapter of *firsts* having turned into tales of bravery, it would seem strange if nothing were said about the Railway Mail Service. For the RMS men have sometimes to meet emergencies, as serious as they are unexpected, with courage and daring. Like the air-mail pilots, their motto must always be: "Get the Mail Through."

When the western country was growing rapidly and the western railroads had trouble to keep the mails moving on time, these emergencies were especially numerous. The story of one of them is told by Frank H. Spearman in his delightful tales of western railroading, entitled *Held for Orders:*

The government, eager to shorten the mail schedules to the Pacific Coast, had invited each western road to make a test run. Large sums were at stake in the form of future payments for carrying the transcontinental mail, and each road made every effort to win. Trackmen went over every foot of track; the finest locomotives were groomed for the run until they shone with perfection; crack trains were shunted onto sidings; all was ready for the eventful day.

Three Ancient Concord Stages



In Norway Automatic Slot Machines Are Put in Public Places for Sale of Postage Stamps.

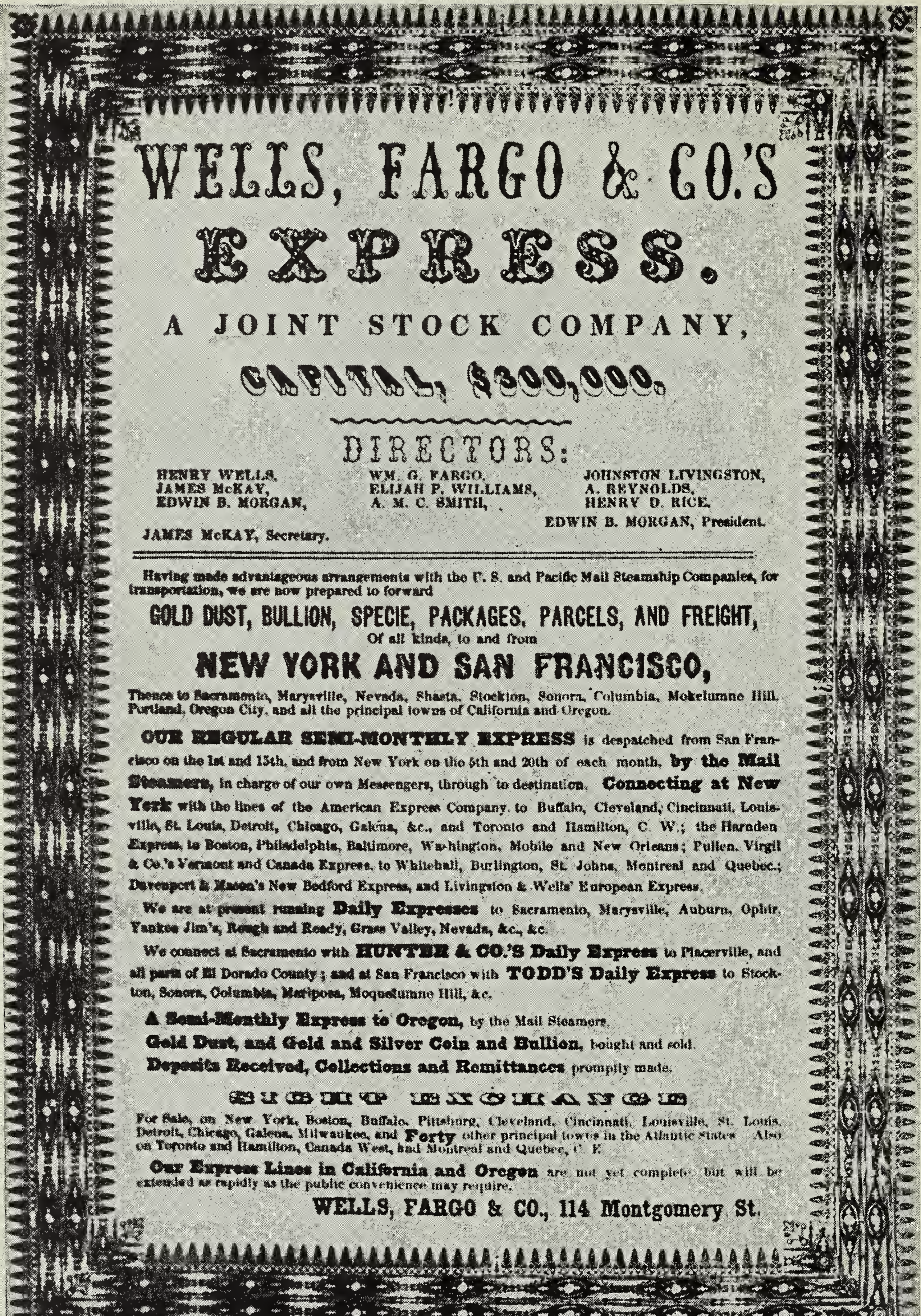
It was a beautiful train, all cream and gold and brightwork shining in the sun; as it reached the western mountains it was on time. But up in the hills, where the grades were steep and the curves were sharp, something happened. The engine left the track, the engineer was badly hurt, and the fine train of cream and gold lay a helpless and bedraggled wreck. Up and down the roadway lay a tangled mass of scattered mail.

Affairs looked pretty bad; but American pluck and determination rose to the occasion. The fireman was unhurt; the mail clerks were already scrambling out of the wreckage; three empty box cars and the engine of a near-by freight train were commandeered, and Jimmy, the fireman, took command.

Street Cars and Buses in Norway Carry Letter Boxes.

A Sioux hunting party was looking on. Jimmy held converse with the Indians, and they were soon helping with the Great White Father's mail. Once it was in the cars, the mail safely stowed away, and the Indians clinging to the brake rods, Indians and mail were taken for a ride that is still talked about in the tepees and round the campfires. Through canyon and past mesa, down gorges and over mountain torrents, Jimmy drove his wheezing engine and reeling cars, while the whole railroad division went distracted in their search for the lost mail train.

When they rolled into headquarters, the freckled fireman was in for a tongue lashing that was only avoided when he explained that the



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Having made advantageous arrangements with the U. S. and Pacific Mail Steamship Companies, for transportation, we are now prepared to forward

GOLD DUST, BULLION, SPECIE, PACKAGES, PARCELS, AND FREIGHT,

Of all kinds, to and from

NEW YORK AND SAN FRANCISCO,

Thence to Sacramento, Marysville, Nevada, Shasta, Stockton, Sonora, Columbia, Mokelumne Hill, Portland, Oregon City, and all the principal towns of California and Oregon.

OUR REGULAR SEMI-MONTHLY EXPRESS is despatched from San Francisco on the 1st and 15th, and from New York on the 5th and 20th of each month, **by the Mail Steamers,** in charge of our own Messengers, through to destination. **Connecting at New York** with the lines of the American Express Company, to Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago, Galena, &c., and Toronto and Hamilton, C. W.; the Harnden Express, to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Mobile and New Orleans; Pullen, Virgil & Co.'s Vermont and Canada Express, to Whitehall, Burlington, St. Johns, Montreal and Quebec.; Davenport & Mason's New Bedford Express, and Livingston & Wells' European Express.

We are at present running **Daily Expresses** to Sacramento, Marysville, Auburn, Ophir, Yankee Jim's, Rough and Ready, Grass Valley, Nevada, &c., &c.

We connect at Sacramento with **HUNTER & CO.'S Daily Express** to Placerville, and all parts of El Dorado County; and at San Francisco with **TODD'S Daily Express** to Stockton, Sonora, Columbia, Mariposa, Moquelumne Hill, &c.

A Semi-Monthly Express to Oregon, by the Mail Steamers.

Gold Dust, and Gold and Silver Coin and Bullion, bought and sold.

Deposits Received, Collections and Remittances promptly made.

SIGHT EXCHANGE

For Sale, on New York, Boston, Buffalo, Pittsburg, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago, Galena, Milwaukee, and **Forty** other principal towns in the Atlantic States. Also on Toronto and Hamilton, Canada West, and Montreal and Quebec, C. E.

Our Express Lines in California and Oregon are not yet complete, but will be extended as rapidly as the public convenience may require.

WELLS, FARGO & CO., 114 Montgomery St.

mail was all there, that only a little time had been lost, and that the day had been saved. “But,” said Jimmy slowly, keeping a watchful eye on the waiting Indians, “I promised these bucks a caddy of tobacco, Mr. Callahan. Would you please look after ’em for me?”

The solemn chief of the Indians looked hopefully at Callahan and proudly at Jimmy, waved his hand, and spoke: “Heap much mail! Heap much ride!” and pointing to the abashed engineer, gave him a name that stayed with him for the rest of his life. “Heap much go fast. Heap much engineer. Heap much Jimmy-the-Wind.”

There’s a lot of that Jimmy-the-Wind spirit to be found among the men of the railway mail.

8

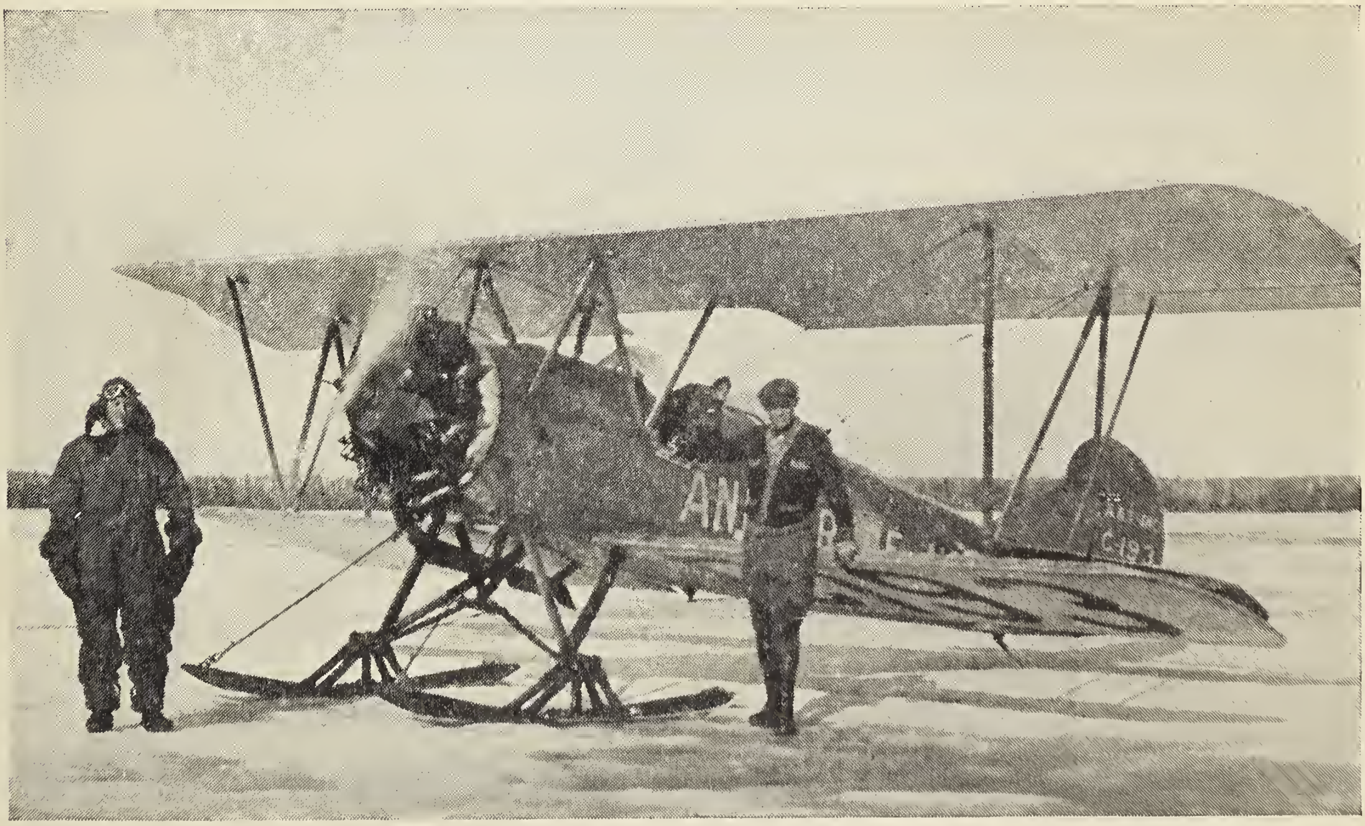
The Pony That Did the Trick

FOR years an old stagecoach stood in a certain tavern yard. It was an ancient thing, cobwebbed and dingy, on which the children used to play. They would get the biggest, oldest hats that they could find; each boy would tie a large red handkerchief loosely about his throat, and across his knees he would lay his trusty gun.

One boy was the driver, with four long ropes for lines that reached down to his champing steeds. Another boy was guard; he sat beside the driver with his rifle across his knees. Between them were the bags of mail. Down a steep gorge they rode, one foot of the driver on the brake, his wary eye on the team. On one side was a terrible precipice, on the other a forbidding wall of rock. Just as the wicked Indians broke into a curdling yell, the driver rose in his seat and cracked his whip; the horses plunged forward; the rifles spit their deadly fire; and at every shot an Indian—

What I should say was that the boys had a fine time. The old stagecoach understood. It had been through many such an Indian fight that was real, and its shaky old wheels had carried many a brave man safely and saved many a bag of mail.

Most of that kind of thing is over now. But when America was still young, as the years went by people streamed down the old Wilderness Trail, over the Erie Canal, across mountains, and over unbridged riv-



About to Take Off on the Ice in the Far North ers. They filled the roads that led into the great West. As the Indians gave way before them, the forests fell under their busy axes, the Mississippi was crossed, and the prairies were subdued. The Santa Fe Trail was opened; California began to call them; the great Mormon movement to Utah set in; and presently the wave of new comers was spreading along the Pacific Coast.

There was neither telegraph, telephone, nor town along the way. The trail had no milestones. It hadn't so much as a sign to tell which way to go; but when the Oregon Trail was most traveled, in 1842 to 1844, the canvas wagon covers, often four abreast, stretched out in the distance for a mile or more.

That was the day of the covered wagon, followed in 1849 by the California gold rush. With no railroads west of the Missouri River, two thousand miles of barren and uninhabited country had to be crossed with ox teams, pack trains, and on foot. What is today a fertile granary and a region of prosperous cities and towns, was a desolate waste, rocked by sudden storms and burned by a cruel heat.

There was a most strenuous call for mail facilities as these stout-hearted emigrants pushed on, cut off from all news of home and friends. The government was at a loss to know how to meet the call. Long years of debate set in; clamor and differences of opinion arose as to how mails might best be transported over such long distances and through such difficulties.

Some of the plans that were suggested seem now to have been quite absurd, though at the time they seemed fairly reasonable. One of the most fantastic was the idea of having caravans of camels carry mail, and possibly freight, across the Great American Desert to the waiting throngs in California.

You know how it is on a desert; there's no water, and there is a great deal of sand and heat. Everybody knows that the way to cross a desert is to get on a camel, put some water in a jug, and then away through the burning sands until you come to an oasis. That was the way they did it in ancient Arabia and along the Nile. But it sounds strange now to hear that it was tried right here in America.

This happened a few years before the American War between the States, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War. His southern sym-

Transferring Bags of Foreign Mail in New York Harbor pathies made him favor the more southerly of the various routes that were being discussed. In line with the general idea of what the desert country was like, he opened negotiations with the Sultan of Turkey, and finally got the camels; he established the first and only camel express America has ever known.

But the camels were sulky, hysterical, temperamental brutes. They didn't last long. Their Arab drivers went back home. The desert wasn't so very sandy, after all, and the lava beds and sharp rocks cut the camels' feet. The beasts balked and kicked, ran away with the mail bags, and bit the cowboys who tried to look after them. The idea of camel caravans had to be given up.

Stagecoaches were the next thing. Of course it was known that men were riding all over the West in stagecoaches, fighting Indians and wild beasts, fording impossible streams, and now and then tumbling down mountain cliffs. A stage line was even operated from Independence as far west as Santa Fe. But a stage line all the way to the Coast was different. It meant that stations must be set up every few miles and stocked with horses, stages, and attendants. Sleeping accommodations must also be provided for passengers, with means for feeding them. All of this meant that a large sum must be expended before the stages could run.

Finally, in 1857, a route was laid out via Fort Smith, El Paso, Tucson, and the Old Spanish Trail. It extended from St. Louis to San Francisco, and was twenty-eight hundred miles long. It cost the owners $600,000 a year to operate it. One hundred sixty-five relay stations were required, each with stables and shops. There were springs to locate and wells to dig in this region, where in most cases, water was very scarce. Seven hundred fifty selected drivers, stock tenders, and agents had to be trained, a hundred vehicles placed at various stages along the line, and two thousand horses bought, fed, and cared for. The journey was to be made in twenty-three days, and the stages were to run twice a week.

By this time the Mormon settlement at Salt Lake had grown so rapidly that mail facilities must be provided for them. So what was known as the Central Route was opened, from St. Joseph to San Francisco, through Fort Kearney, Julesburg, Fort Laramie, and South Pass, to Fort Bridger, Salt Lake City, and Sacramento. This was almost a thousand miles shorter than that via El Paso; but the government favored the Southern Route for most of the mail, and *The Overland Mail*, as the Central Route was called, had to be given up.

This led, eventually, to the creation of the Pony Express. Stages were now running; a railroad was talked about that would reach across the continent; the telegraph had been invented and its wires were steadily moving westward. Something light and swift was needed to fill in the gap between stagecoach and telegraph.

A route was laid out for the Pony Express between St. Joseph, where connection could be made with the Missouri River boats from St. Louis, and Sacramento, where other river steamers ran down to San Francisco Bay.

The Start of the First Pony Express, St. Joseph, Missouri

Relay stations were set up every ten or fifteen miles along the route, not unlike the post houses on the old Roman post roads. At each station fresh horses were held in instant readiness, and carefully picked young men, bold and daring, who could ride fast and face danger without losing their heads, were the express riders. Each man was well armed, and carried a small bag in which the mail was placed. He must travel light, for he must be ready often to run for his life. Each horse was expected to cover about ten miles at a trip, and each man was expected to ride about a hundred miles. He found food and safety at the rest stations unless, as happened now and then, the Indians, keen to get hold of the horses, had attacked some station before the rider arrived.

As the rider approached the station he flung himself off the pony while still at full speed, seized the pouch in which the letters reposed, and leaped into the saddle of a fresh horse. The waiting horse knew his business and was off at full gallop the instant he felt the rider fully seated.

There were four hundred of these horses, and eighty riders were at all times in the saddle—forty of them eastbound and forty westbound. Buffalo Bill was one of these riders. Once, when the rider who was to take over the pouch at the end of Bill's run had been killed, it is said that Bill rode straight on to the meeting with the next rider. There, finding that there was no one to make the return trip, he rode straight back again, a total of three hundred twenty miles, and twenty-one continuous hours in the saddle.

The Pony Express made its first trip in 1860, leaving St. Joseph on April 3 and arriving at San Francisco in nine days. At that time the best stagecoach record was nineteen days. The distance is 1966 miles.

When it was first inaugurated, the Pony Express made one trip a week, each way; but the demand for speed was so strong that the service was soon expanded to two trips a week. Each man carried forty or fifty letters. These were written on tissue paper, so that the weight might be kept down. The postage was five dollars a letter.

The speed of this service was so much greater than any means of transportation before known, and it was such a daring and spectacular thing to do, that it occasioned widespread interest. This was especially true in San Francisco. The first gold seekers had been compelled to depend on mail via the Isthmus of Panama, four to six weeks on the road, with mails sometimes a month apart or more. When this was followed by the stagecoach, a month on the road from the Mississippi, it was felt that a great advance had been made. Now with the first pony due at the San Francisco docks, only a little more than a week on the road, the people lit bonfires, burned tar barrels, cheered, and marched wildly through the streets. They had a brass band. Someone rang the fire bells and the firemen were called out, looking in vain for the fire.

It grew to be midnight. The crowd held on. Out of the darkness at last a steamer came gliding up to the dock. A small pony stood in the prow. They cheer him; they weep over him; they throw ribbons round his neck. The band plays. The little horse steps mincingly, nervously to the wharf. The men form a parade with the pony at its head, and start once more through the town.

Small wonder that there should be great excitement! These men are two thousand miles or more from home, and the little pony and his fellows have thrust a continent behind their hoofs and put another girdle round the earth. Take down your map and trace his footsteps—St. Joseph, Kearney, Laramie, Bridger, Salt Lake. It was a brave and noble trip. The lithe pony and his fellows, all unknowingly, had helped bind the Far West closer to the home land at a time when the need was great.

The Pony Express did not last long. The railroads were pushing farther and farther west. The telegraph was building rapidly across the country. A year and a half after it started, the Pony Express was gone. The great day of steam and electricity was at hand. News from New York or Boston could be placed in San Francisco in an hour or less. Soon letters by rail would be delivered far more quickly than the ponies had been able to carry them. It was thought in 1860 that this announcement in the eastern papers was the final word in speed:

> **1860**
>
> The first courier of the Pony Express will leave the Missouri River Tuesday, April 3rd, at 5 AM. Runs weekly thereafter, carrying letter mail.

And in 1923, again, newspapers heralded what was thought by many to be the last word:

1923

Pilot Ends Epochal Trip
Thousands Greet
AEROPLANE
as it ends its speedy
voyage from the Atlantic
to the Pacific in
34 Hours

But today, with streamlined railroad trains, improved engines, and perfect roadbeds, trains make the journey between Chicago and Los Angeles in about thirty-four hours, while long-range mail planes leave New York in the evening and land on the Pacific Coast for breakfast the next morning.

The mails, today, move with lightning speed.

9

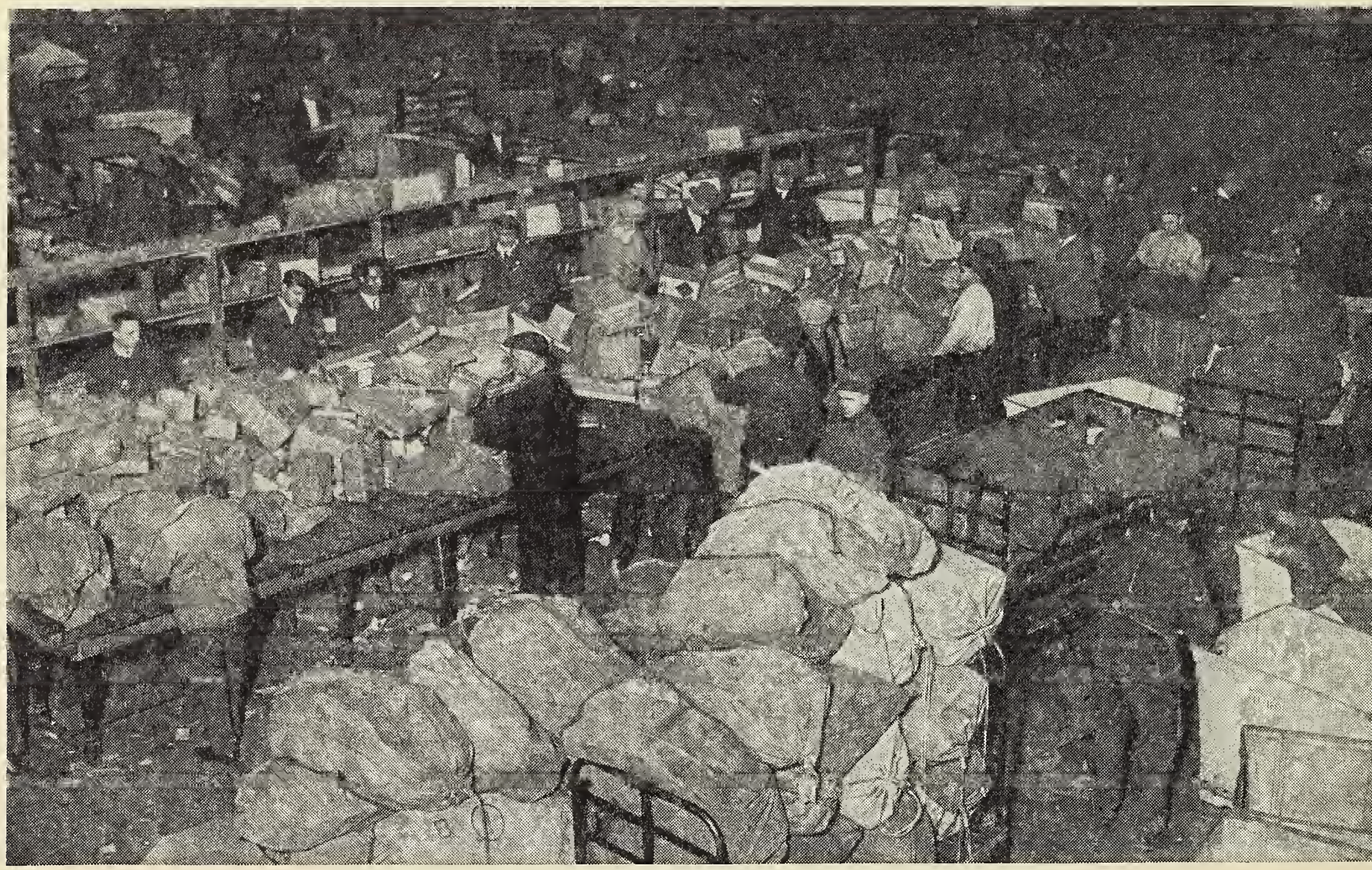
The Sorters That Sort

IN THE post office business the question of sorting letters and papers is a pretty serious one. It looks, sometimes, as if that was about all the post office is good for, although it really does many other things.

In the old days of runners and postboys and stagecoaches there had been no place in which to sort mail en route. The letters were simply placed in a bag and carried from one town to another. At each stopping place the postmaster opened it, took out the letters belonging to him, placed the rest of them back in the bag, locked it, and gave it to the rider to take on to the next village or town.

That was the way in England, and that was the way, a little later, in the United States. One postmaster, in those early days, out in the Far West, set up a washtub in his store; anyone who wished to mail a letter threw it into the tub. Anyone looking for a letter fished around in the tub until he found what he was looking for.

When the big gold rush came, in California, Mr. Bayard Taylor, who wrote books, tells about being in San Francisco when a steamer brought the delayed mail from Panama. There were forty-five thousand letters, all at once, and a mob of anxious men waiting to get hold of them. The postmaster was at his wit's end.



The Christmas Rush in a Large Post Office

Mr. Taylor turned in to help him, and they locked the doors and went to work. They were two or three days getting that mail straightened out. There hadn't been any mail for months, and the men were frantic for news. They broke down the doors, broke down the mail boxes that the postmaster had set up, and swarmed all over the place.

At last they were all put out, and the postmaster began at A, and worked down the alphabet—Mr. Ackerman and Mr. Adams got their mail first; and at last poor Mr. Zuber and the rest of the Z's got theirs; but it was several days before the postmaster got around to them.

If such mail as this could have been sorted en route, the difficulty would have been avoided; but it was many years before post-office officials learned how this sorting might be done.

The first mail ever carried in America by railroad train was in 1834, over seventy-eight miles of railway. This small mileage steadily increased; but most of the mail was carried by stagecoach for many years. On the railway trains, as on the stagecoaches, the mail was handled in closed pouches, not to be opened until one of the larger cities was reached. At these larger towns, as the amount of mail increased, the post office maintained what were known as distributing offices—the men called them *DPO'S.* The idea seems to have been to concentrate all mail at these larger offices, there to distribute and reforward it to the various towns for which it was intended. This was very cumbersome, and delayed delivery badly. But it was continued until, in 1864, the system broke down of its own weight.

This breakdown was due partly to the great increase in the amount of mail, partly to the increased distances it had to be carried into the newly settled West, and partly to the greater part now played by the railways in handling mail.

In their earlier days the railroads had not always compared well with the stagecoach. They were not always either as swift or as sure. By 1850 few railroads ran their trains faster than twenty-five miles an hour. For many years no road attempted to operate a train at night. Train wrecks, too, were rather numerous; there was a very definite prejudice against the loss of mail which was thus sometimes destroyed.

Nevertheless, the railroad mail gradually increased in quantity; railroad service improved; and as early as 1838, between Philadelphia and Baltimore, some sorting of mail was attempted en route. The first night mail did not run until 1860, when the experiment was tried of handling mail between New York and Boston at night.

Then came the problem of taking care of the rapidly growing mail between Chicago and St. Louis and the Far West. There were railroads as far west as Council Bluffs, with a through road west from Chicago; and as far as St. Joseph, with a road west from Hannibal, Missouri. Beyond that, the whole movement had to be by stagecoach, and at these western railheads the mail was piling up in hopeless tons.

This congestion seriously affected the great DPO's that were being maintained at St. Louis and Chicago. At Hannibal the situation distressed Mr. Davis, the postmaster, to such a degree that he persuaded

Sorting Mail in a Large Post Office

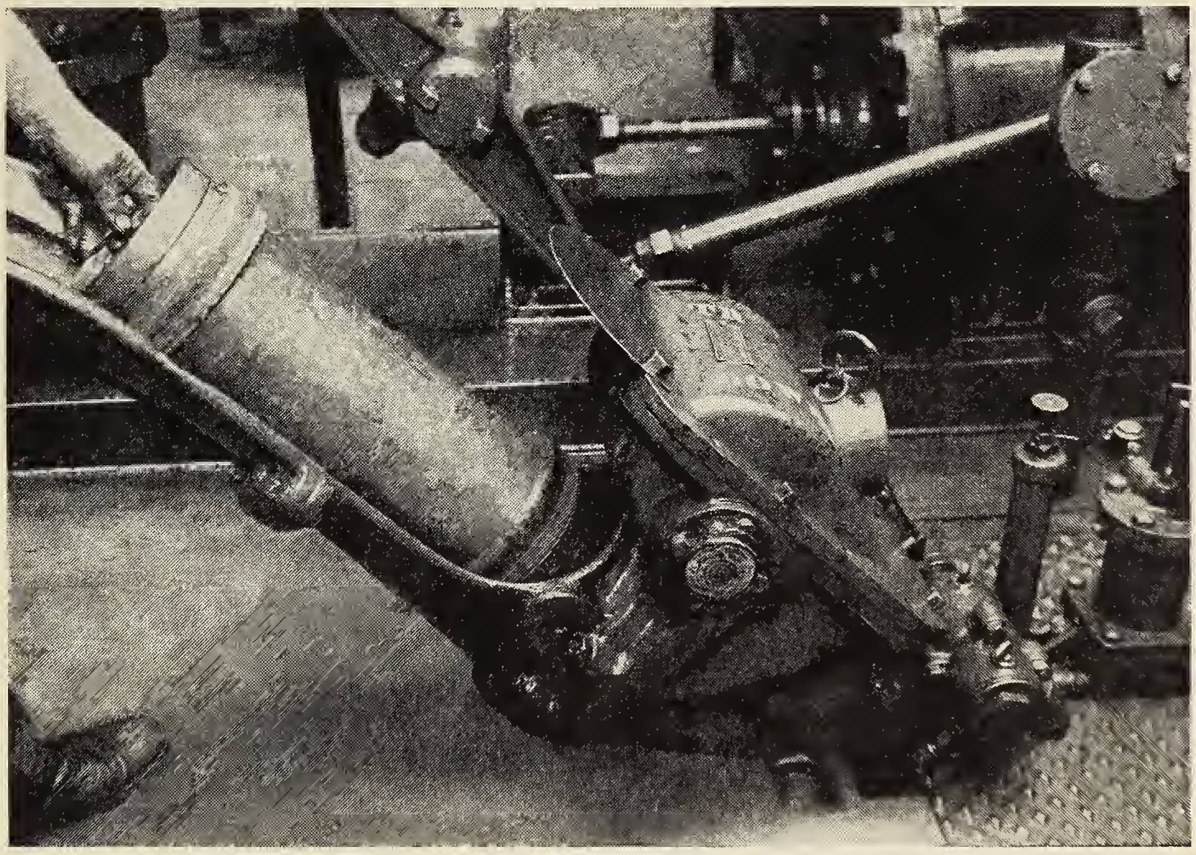
the railway people to let him put a few pigeonholes in a baggage car on which he and his assistant rode to St. Joseph, sorting as much mail as they could.

But do what they could, matters grew steadily worse. A letter addressed to a man in a mining camp in Nevada might go hundreds of miles past him in a locked pouch that was destined for San Francisco, and only come back to him after several weeks of delay. The prairies and mountains were marked with the crowded trails of westbound

The Post Office on Wheels

wagons, and Panama was thick with men on their way across to catch ship for the gold fields. The volume of westbound mail grew day by day with the growing West.

There was a young man at the Chicago post office, as assistant postmaster, who saw that something had to be done, and who thought he knew what it should be. The post office there was jammed with mail, waiting to be sorted and sent on. One of the difficulties about handling it was that at this time the post-office regulations required every package of letters to be carefully wrapped in brown paper, tied, and the name of the post office for which it was intended written on the package in ink. Postal clerks in the distributing offices worked in a mass of discarded twine and paper, and handled hundreds of locked pouches in which possibly less than a dozen letters might be found. Even if only one letter was to be forwarded, it must be wrapped up, the package addressed, and the single missive securely locked up.



Dispatching Mail Between a Large Post Office and Its Branches by Pneumatic Tube

One reason why Mr. Armstrong felt that he knew what should be done was that he had recently been sent to Cairo, Illinois, where General Grant was gathering an army, and where the soldiers' mail had become a serious problem. The men, kept from getting the letters that lay there waiting for them unsorted, were becoming restless. Being a skillful and experienced man, Armstrong soon had the tangle straightened and returned home.

When he got back, he began to bombard the officials at Washington with letters about handling the Western mail that was piling up. His letters got scant attention, but he kept them up until his superiors finally gave him permission to go ahead with his plans.

Armstrong believed that the way to solve the problem was to fit up a car in which he could distribute the mail while the car moved on its way to its destination, instead of storing it in Chicago until the clerks there could get round to sorting it.

As part of his plan, he proposed to quit wrapping up the letters and tying them into packages that had to be addressed on the outside. Instead of that, he proposed to tie up the letters for each town with one of the letters facing outside, to show where the package was to go. In that package he would put all the letters for that town, no matter where they came from, and stop the useless locking up of each little pack of mail in a separate pouch.

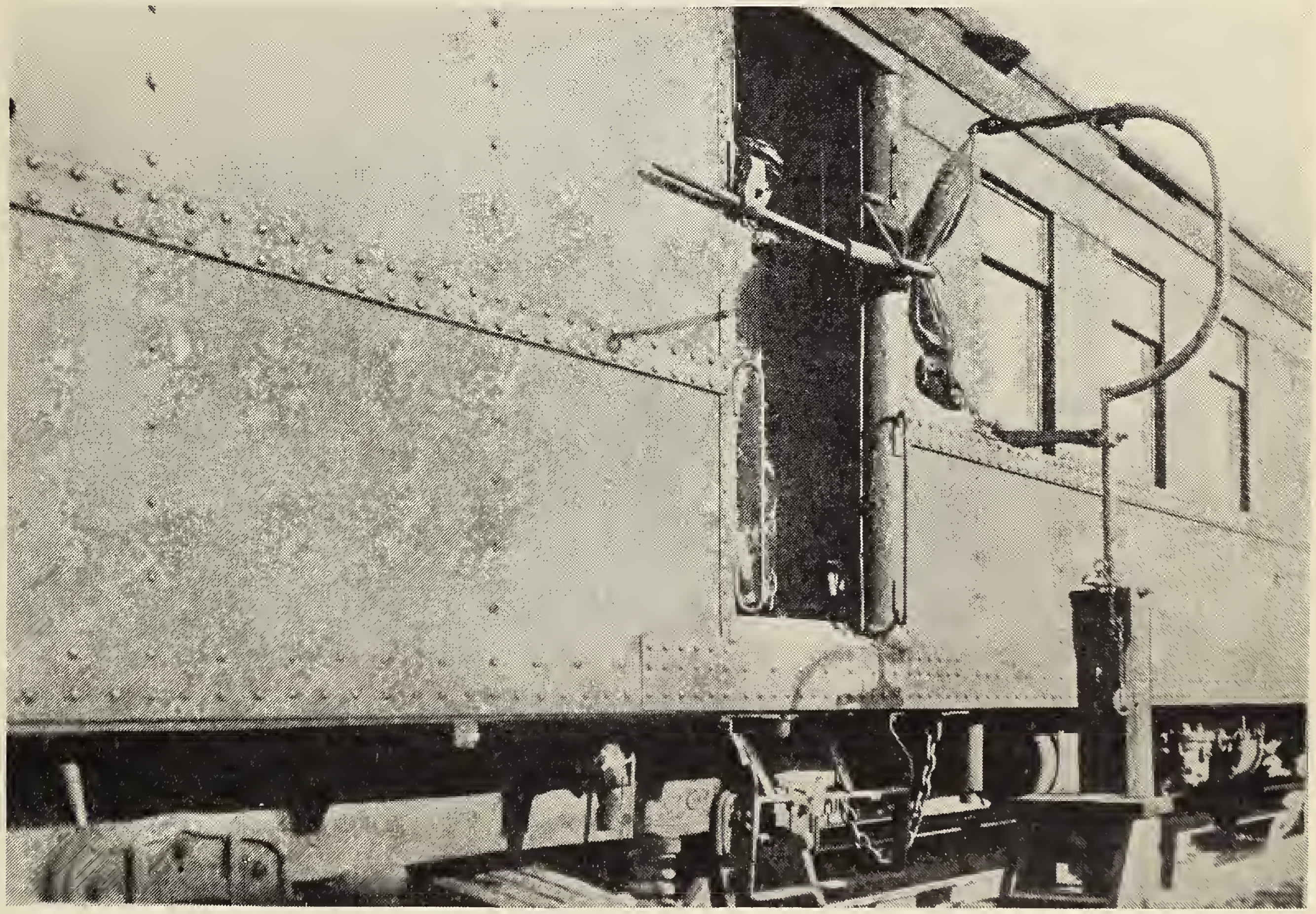
Two facts stood out in Armstrong's plan. The first was that the post office is primarily *a place in which to sort mail;* and the second is *that he could fix up such a post office on wheels!* The idea seemed so fanciful to the officials in Washington that they were slow about giving the young man authority to try the experiment. That authority once secured, however, Armstrong lost no time in calling on the railroad people who operated the line between Chicago and Council Bluffs. They fell in with his plan immediately, and supplied him with an old baggage car which they fitted up for him with an arrangement of letter cases built upon much the same plan that we see in the modern railway post office. The old car is still on exhibition at the Field Museum, Chicago, as an object of historical interest. At one end of the car he had a whole case of pigeonholes, with a broad table in front. At the other end he built a larger case for newspapers and packages. He loaded the car so full of mail that you could hardly walk in it. Then he climbed aboard with a helper. When they reached the end of the run they had "worked" that whole car of mail clear through, and there it lay, all neatly tagged and bagged. Across the river from Council Bluffs the Union Pacific Railroad had already been built a considerable distance west from Omaha. Instead of lying at Council Bluffs for days or weeks, Armstrong's carload of mail was all ready to be forwarded without delay. The day of the railway post office had dawned! There have been many improvements since that day, but this marked the beginning of the story.

A Railway Post Office, or *RPO*, as it is called, is a railway car in which the equipment of racks, cases, pigeonholes and other apparatus is very complete, and the car and its crew receive, sort, and discharge an incredible amount of mail. Usually the crew consists of three or four men. One attends the door, taking on mail that he picks up with the catcher as the train whirls through the smaller towns, and throwing off the bags to be left there. Another man sorts newspapers and packages, while a third works at the letter case. If it is a heavy route, a fourth man is kept busy emptying the cases and locking up pouches as fast as they are filled.

When distributed in the pigeonholes of the letter case, the letters are taken out, tied into bundles, and on each bundle a slip of paper is placed, showing destination, the RPO number, and the clerk's name. The newspapers and packages are thrown into the gaping mouths of mail pouches that are hung at one side of the car in a rack of iron rods. Each bag is labeled for a town or for a connecting train.

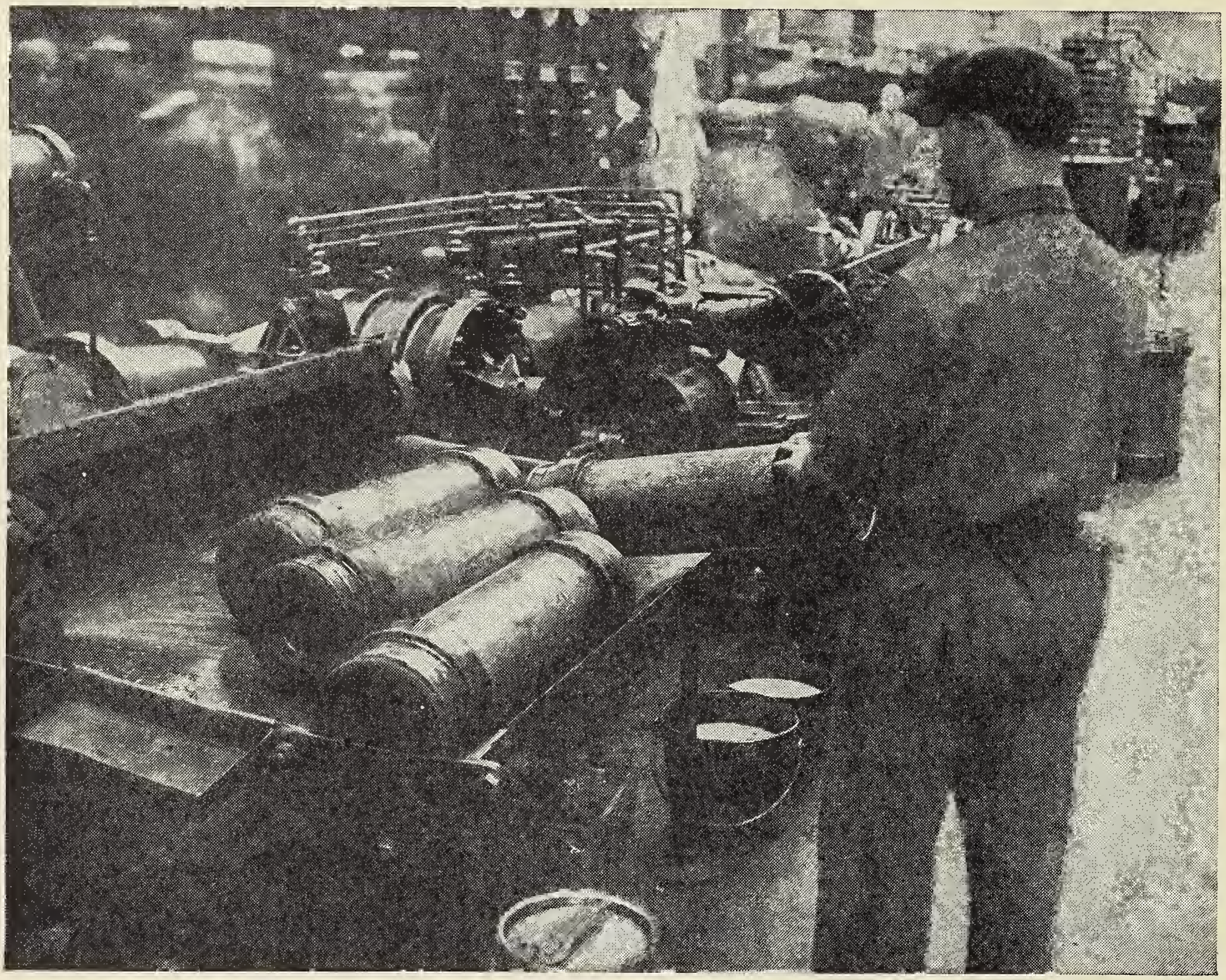
The Horse and Buggy Are Still Used to Deliver Mail.

A continuous stream of pouches enters and leaves the train. Beside the railway track at each station through which the train speeds without stopping stands a mail crane, a tall post with arms to which are attached a mail pouch, tied at its middle, so that the long arm of the "catcher" may seize the bag as the train whizzes by, and land it in the car. This catcher is one of the most useful and ingenious devices about a railway postal car. When the whistle sounds for a town, one of the crew steps to the car door, turns the short handle of the catcher downward, raising the prong of the catcher so that it catches the waiting pouch fairly in the middle. One man may be kept pretty busy at this on lines where the towns are not too far apart. Meanwhile, the letters



The Mail "Catcher"

are falling at the cases steadily, each into its proper place, plunk! plunk! plunk! like so many bits of shot. In another part of the car great bundles and packages hurtle through the air, thrown deftly into the mouths of the waiting pouches until the air seems alive with flying missiles. The car is filled with the smoke of passing engines, and the men stagger and balance themselves as the train rushes over switch points, through tunnels, and across bridges. The man who handles the catcher is continually dragging heavy pouches across the floor and



Sorting Pneumatic Tubes

emptying their staggering medley of letters and packages on the heaped-up tables in front of the men whose task seems thus to be endlessly renewed. Then he drags other bags across the floor, balances them at the open door, and at the proper moment throws them onto the platform of a passing station.

The skill of these men is great. On each package of letters the clerk, as he ties it up, places what he calls a "facing slip." On this slip he writes his name and number, the number of the train, and the date; and printed on it is the name of the town to which the package is to go. Any errors the clerk may make are written on the back of the slip when the package is opened. This slip is then sent to Washington, where a strict record is kept. These men sometimes have as many as ten thousand names of towns, trains, and train schedules, to commit to memory; yet with all their hurry and turmoil, the records show the men to be correct more than ninety-nine per cent of the time. This is due in great part to the system under which the men, at certain intervals, are called in to headquarters for examination. Here each man is given a packet of addressed cards which he has to distribute in a case of small pigeonholes that is known as the *sweat case*. It certainly causes him to sweat; for any errors he makes in the distribution are charged against his record.

Much of the bulkier forms of mail, such as packages of newspapers, magazines, and parcel post, is distributed in the larger post offices before being sent to the train. This relieves the men on the railway post offices of a great deal of work and saves much of their already crowded space for handling letters, registered mail, and other important material. The bulky matter that is thus distributed before starting out can be forwarded in sealed storage cars without breaking bulk.

There are a large number of RPO cars and their crews in commission in the United States. They are carried on more than four thousand railway trains, covering more than two hundred thousand miles of railway every day. Over twenty thousand men are required for the crews. There are over fifty thousand post offices in America; over twenty-six billion pieces of mail matter pass through them every year, and a large part of it is handled by these busy men of the RPO!

Almost Every Country Has Special Air-mail Stamps.

The process of sorting mail in a post office is somewhat different from that used in a railway car. First, in the post office the mail has to be "faced." This doesn't have to be done in the car, because the letters have been through that process before they reach the train. *Facing* means that the letters must all face one way. In a big post office there is a table known as the "pick-up" table, on which mail from the street and post-office boxes is dumped. This table has two long slots, under each of which is an endless belt. As the mail is thrown on the table, men quickly throw all packages and odd-sized envelopes into great chutes that are beside it. Then they place the letters, large envelopes in one slot, and short ones in another, so that they are carried by the endless belts to the end of the table. Here they are stacked, face up, with the stamps in the upper right hand corner. Seven or eight hundred letters a minute are handled in this way. The letters are now ready for the canceling machine. From the canceling machine the letters are taken to what is called the *primary case*, a cabinet of pigeonholes with a table before it. Here they get their first sorting, usually only a few

Asiatic, European, and Mexican Air-mail Stamps separations—one for local mail, one for each near-by state, and one for those letters that have defective addresses.

The letters in each separate pigeonhole then go to the *secondary case*. For instance, letters to towns in *Pennsylvania* go to a case that may have as many as two hundred separate pigeonholes, each for a city, railway train, or group of towns. After this, a third sorting is given, with even closer distribution.

For delivery, mail is first separated for *lock boxes*, *general delivery*, and *branch offices*. Mail for free delivery is distributed in a case in which each pigeonhole represents a particular carrier. By the carriers, the mail is afterward arranged on what is known as the *routing case*, so that it will fall in the order in which it is to be delivered to office buildings, stores, and residences.

On railway trains, much of this sorting is avoided; it has been done in the post office before the mail came to the train. But on many railway routes, distribution is made in great detail. On some through trains the distribution is so complete that mail for important terminal cities is separated into carrier routes and is all ready for the carrier to take it in charge the moment it reaches the post-office door.

Many fast through trains are now run over American railways that are made up wholly of mail cars. The first train of this character made its first trip in 1875 from New York to Chicago. It was a very important occasion in the eyes of postal men. A special train was prepared for the journey; it left New York at 4.00 P.M., well loaded with mail.

It reached Chicago the next evening at 6.00 o'clock, one minute ahead of time. That was fast work for those days. The engineer who brought the train into Chicago, so it is said, was so overcome with excitement and a feeling of responsibility that he fainted in the cab as soon as the train stopped.

10

Banker and Errand Boy

ONCE a boy wrote a composition about the post office. "The post office," said he, "is a very curious place. You take your secreates there. A man would not tell them even to his wife; but he will put them in a weake envelope, with a postage stamp, and no one finds them out."

The boy wasn't much as a speller; but he knew something about the mails.

They had much trouble with the mails, both in England and in America, before they could be made to keep secrets. As you have seen from what has already been said, both the postboys in England and the

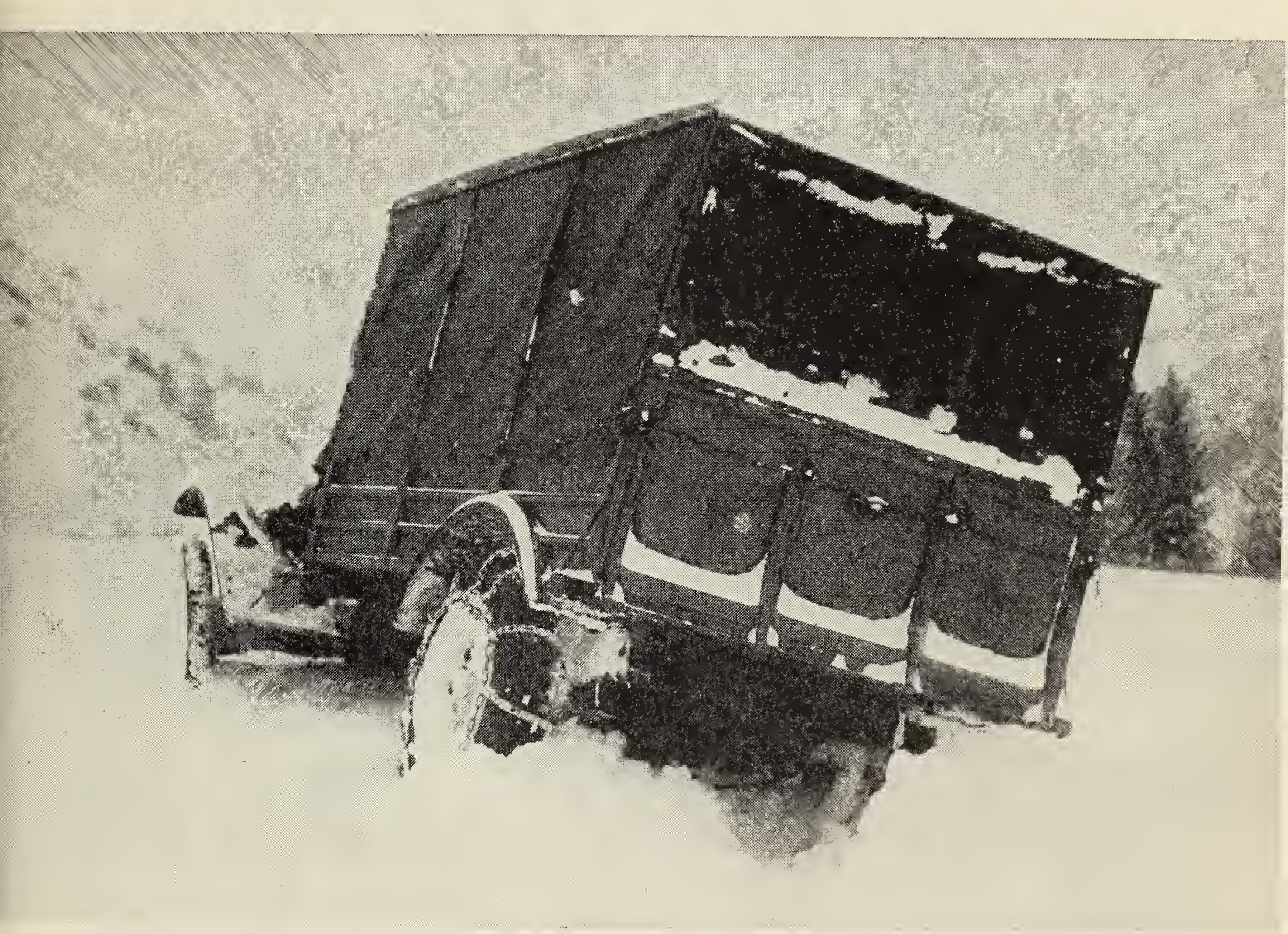
postriders with whom Franklin had to deal in America opened and read the letters as they went along. Much of the mail in those early days also got lost, or stolen, or destroyed. Dick Turpin and the highwaymen put on masks and at the mouth of the pistol held up the stage. "Mails robbed," became a frequent piece of news—so frequent that many entrusted their letters to their friends rather than risk the mails.

Now it happened, too, that many people wanted to use the mails to send money—money to buy goods or pay a debt, or money to one's family or friends. But the money was fairly sure to disappear en route. It was said that, in 1855, from a half million to a million was stolen annually.

There were various reasons for this. For one thing, the payment of postage by the person to whom a letter was addressed was uncertain. He might feel that, if the postage was heavy, it was hardly worth his while to take chances on there being anything whatever in the letter that would interest him. Another reason, of course, was the fairly wide prevalence of highway bandits along the English roads. The third reason we have already referred to—the fact that postriders would open letters and remove anything of value they might contain.

Someone devised a most remarkable plan by which to avoid losing money by these means. He tore the paper money in two, and sent only one piece of it. The man who received it held the piece until another letter could be sent a day or two later, in which the remaining half of each bill or note could be enclosed. When he received this, he pasted the two halves together and the transaction was complete. Pretty awkward? It certainly was!

Then someone had another great idea. It was that a magical bit of paper might be used instead of money. Magical, do you say? No, not real, true magic, like taking a rabbit out of a hat. But when the people saw how simple it was and how much it did for them, it seemed like magic.



Rough Going

This magical bit of paper was what we call a *money order!* We use money orders by the millions. Because of them, and of bank checks and drafts, the mail robber is just about out of a job.

Now a money order is something like this: You go to the post office and you tell the clerk that you want to send some money to Messrs. Smith, Brown, and Robinson, or whatever the name is. The clerk gives you a small printed slip on which you write your name and address, and the name and address of the person to whom the money is to be paid. It takes but a moment. You turn the slip over to the clerk, pay him the money that you want sent and he makes out an order on the postmaster in the town in which Smith, Brown, and Robinson are located. He gives you this order, and you mail it to them instead of sending them the money. They sign it and turn it in to their bank, or take it to the post office and get the money. You pay the clerk a small sum for this service, varying according to the amount to be sent. Any sum up to $100.00 will be handled in this way, and will be sent not only to any point in the United States, but to many foreign countries. Millions of dollars are thus handled; it is no longer necessary to tear good money in two and risk its reaching the person to whom you wish to send it. The money itself does not have to travel at all.

The money order system in America went into effect in 1864.

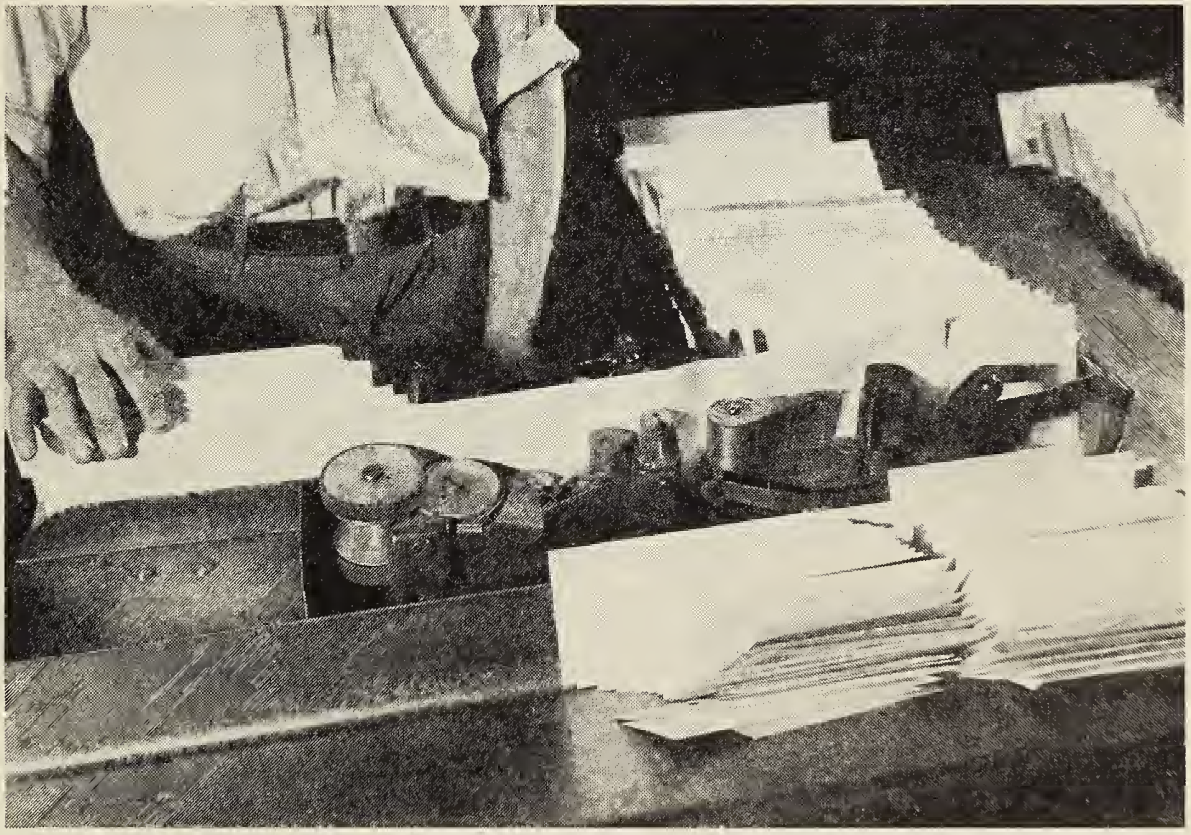
So it will be seen that sorting mail is not the only thing the post office does these days. It also acts as banker, insurance company, and errand boy. Not only does it accept your money for dispatch to distant points, but it accepts money for deposit, much as a savings bank would do.

This is called the *Postal Savings System.* This system, established in 1911, pays two-per-cent interest per year on deposits. Almost two hundred million dollars has thus been placed in the postal savings system up to now, by more than seven hundred thousand depositors. Anyone who is ten years or more of age may place money for savings purposes in this way, and receive savings certificates as evidence.

Then, too, one often wants to send valuables other than money. For this, a system of *uniform registry* is in use, by which the post office accepts a package at a cost of from ten cents to a dollar, varying with the value of the package, and gives you a receipt, agreeing that if the package does not reach its destination safely, it will pay you what it is worth, up to the sum of a thousand dollars. This system went into effect in 1855. But it had no degree of excellence until 1860. Today thousands of packages are thus assured of safe and expeditious handling.

On packages sent by parcel post, the package may be *insured.* That means that if it is lost, you are paid the amount of the insurance. It is needless to say that of the millions of packages handled in this manner, very few indeed fail to reach their destination. The parcel post in America was not established until 1912, although it had been in use in England with most remarkable success for more than twenty-five years.

With its vast organization, touching every community in the country, and with equipment at its disposal, the addition of parcel-post service was made with the view, first of all, to reduction in the cost of living. It was believed by its advocates that it would enable people to get such things as vegetables, butter, and eggs direct from the farm. Apples, potatoes, berries, chickens, beans, and cantaloupes could be placed right at the consumer's door, and save the profit of the middleman. Some of this sort of thing is done, to be sure, but only to a limited degree. Instead, manufacturers and merchants use parcel post to the



The Canceling Machine

extent of millions of packages daily for the purpose of quick and prompt shipment of goods that are not of very heavy weight.

There are restrictions as to weight and as to the size of the package; postal charges are made according to weight and distance to be traveled. These distances are fixed by a system of zones, eight in number, ranging from fifty to eighteen hundred miles. Parcel-post packages may receive what is known as "*special handling*," through the purchase of a "special handling" stamp.

It will be noticed that practically all postal revenue comes from the sale of stamps. Stamps were first authorized in 1845, when the postmasters were permitted to design their own. But the government took over the printing two years later; today hundreds of designs, most of them very beautiful, are produced in the form of stamps of various denominations and for various purposes. These include many special issues in connection with celebrations and anniversaries. Many of these special issues are thought by collectors to be of much interest. Many people, all the way from President Roosevelt and the late King George V to the American schoolboy, take pleasure and profit from stamp collecting; the post-office departments of the various countries encourage philatelists in this commendable pastime.

With the advent of uniform postage, the use of mails grew to a degree that no one could foresee. With this orderliness came certainty and safety that no one had ever known before. For before the use of stamps and uniformity of rate much carelessness obtained. Just listen to this example:

There was once a young writer who lived in western New York. There was to be a literary contest, he heard, in London, with a prize for the best essay that might be submitted. He thought he might win it; so he wrote an essay and took it to the post office, where the postmaster said that the postage would be seventy-two cents. He paid it. When the packet reached New York City, the postmaster there said this was wrong—that the postage was ninety-six cents. So the essay went on its way to London with "Collect Ninety-six Cents" stamped across its face. When the man in London received it, he didn't want to pay four shillings of postage for something he didn't know anything about. So the packet came back to the writer to collect.

Well, naturally, he was angry! Here was a prize of nine thousand dollars, and little or no time left in which to compete for it. So he hurriedly paid the postage again, and the precious essay started off for London once more. But he lost the prize, for no matter how fine his essay might have been, it reached England after the contest had closed!

Today we have so many safeguards against such things that the mails protect the public as far as reason could possibly require.

11

Swift Messengers

I WONDER if you have ever seen the great post office building in New York City? Probably not, unless you live somewhere near it. But if you should ever happen to come to New York you should visit it. Above its beautiful Grecian columns, stretching away for two whole city blocks, you can read, cut into the granite, what a man said twenty-five hundred years ago about postal service. His name was Herodotus; he was describing the posts that had been established by the Persian King, Cyrus, when he said of the King's postriders:

NEITHER SNOW NOR RAIN NOR HEAT NOR GLOOM OF NIGHT STAYS THESE COURIERS FROM THE SWIFT COMPLETION OF THEIR APPOINTED ROUNDS

The New York City Post Office

Such homage is quite proper, paid to these ancient forerunners of the small army of loyal men in whose hands we today place the expeditious handling of our mails. Such men are the letter carriers, of whom

fifty thousand or more bring mail daily to our doors. For them, as with the ancient Persians, "neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night" will keep them from "their appointed rounds."

Letter carriers were first used in 1794, when people had to pay two cents for each letter delivered by them. Now the service is free, and in four thousand cities and towns there are 51,293 carriers. Any village of 1500 or more population may have carrier service provided its postal receipts amount to $5,000 or more per year.

The carrier service has been greatly speeded up in recent years. With the tightening up of schedules since the advent of air mail, the carrier service is more important than ever, and what is known as *special delivery* service has grown to considerable importance. With a special delivery stamp at the cost of ten cents, a special messenger will leave the office with your letter immediately upon its arrival, and without waiting for the regular carrier delivery. All of this is of the utmost importance when we realize that more mail is handled in one day in the New York post office alone, than was handled in a year in the whole United States, in George Washington's time.

Another group of messengers are the men who form the service of rural free delivery. What the carrier is to the city streets, the R.F.D. man is to the country road. When the service was first established, in 1896, it had been the custom for the farmer when he wanted his mail, to trudge through the worst of weather and over the worst of country roads, one, two, three, or four miles to the local post office.

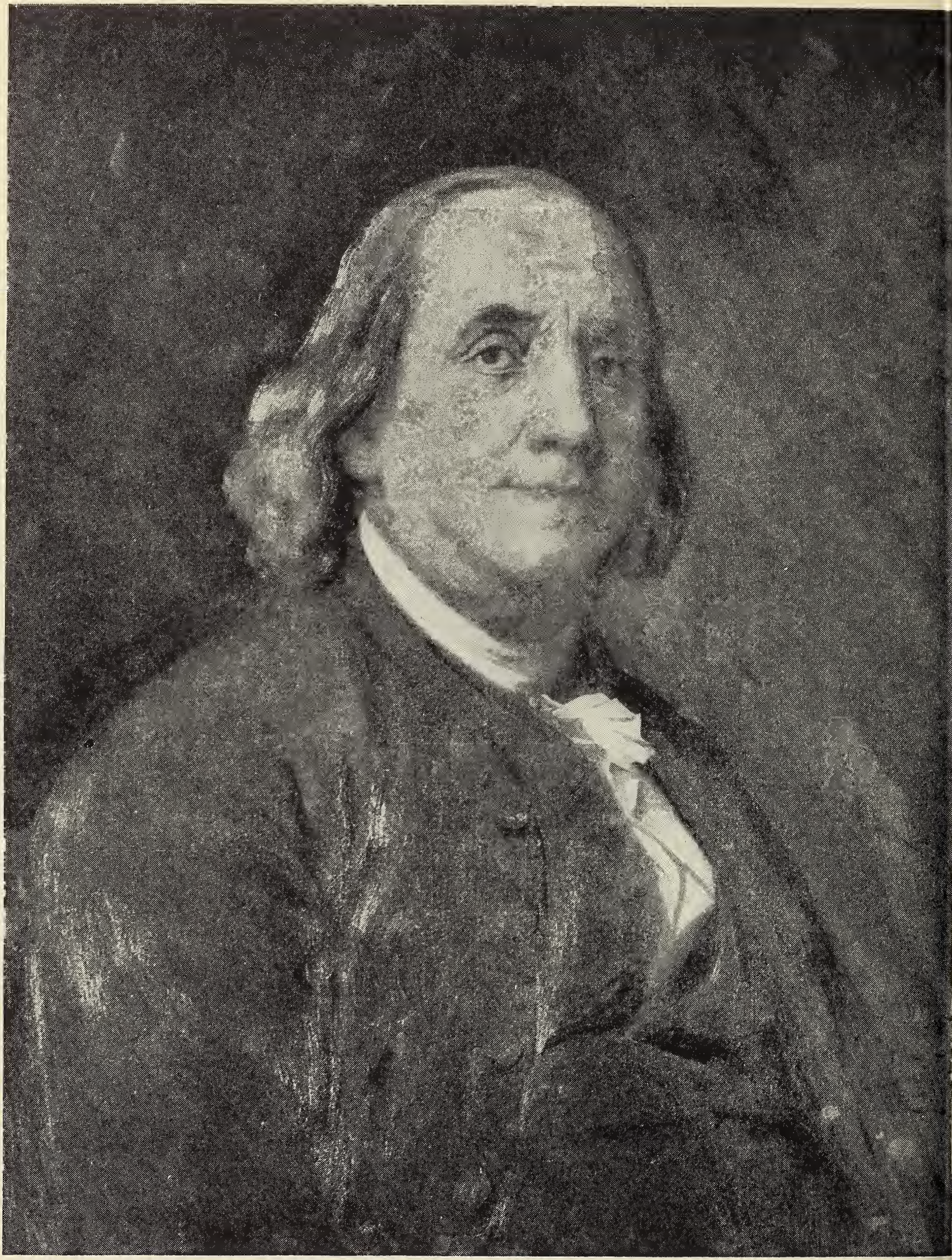
So little mail did he receive that it was often a week or more before he could get time to make this rather difficult journey. When at last he did, he brought back mail for his neighbors as well as for himself, thus saving them a similar journey.

Rural Free Delivery Boxes

Today at the entrance to each farm there stands a large metal box, set on a post, and at each crossroads a whole battery of them, each box bearing a small red flag, something like the flag on a taxi driver's meter, and on each box a farmer's name. The farmers maintain these boxes so that each family may have a place in which the postman can put its mail until someone finds time to run down to the main highway to get it. When the R.F.D. man puts the mail in a box he simply raises the little flag so that the farmer may know whether there is any mail without coming down to the box to find out.

Today, when sixty per cent of all mail is parcel post, the farmer buys many of his supplies by mail and receives a large part of those supplies by parcel post. Forty-two thousand men and women, in little wagons, on horseback, or in automobiles, are busy daily, carrying these supplies, with letters, papers, and packages, all over our rural districts, keeping the lines of communication open with the farms of America.

I once knew a man who was always figuring out what he called *sta-tis-tics.* He knew just how many times all the letters would reach round the world if you placed them end to end; and just how many thousand of millions of newspapers and magazines are mailed each year. He could tell you how high all the railway mail cars in the world would reach if you piled them on top of each other—I forget how far. What he could not tell you was how it is that the post office is able to create so many faithful and loyal servants! No wonder the school boy said that we could trust our "secreates" with them. Year after year they toil and grow old. Gray-clad carriers see us grow up as children and watch our children meet them at the door. Behind them are others equally faithful, busy at distributing cases or stamp windows, swaying to the motion of swift moving railroad trains, or keeping their sea legs in the stuffy mail room of a ship at sea.



Our First Postmaster General

Postmasters are like that, too. Not long ago there was a fine old gentleman in a small post office in New York State who had seen twenty Presidents come and go at Washington. Another fine old man was Mr. Lawrenceson, who had worked for twenty-six different postmasters general. His son, who followed him, was in the department fifty-eight years.

Our American postmasters! Did you ever see a finer, more typical lot of men than our country postmasters? Independent, common-sense men, friendly, interested, neighborly, they know all the people who come to them for mail. Did you know that Abraham Lincoln was one of them? Way back in the old days in a little country store in Illinois, Lincoln was the postmaster. He sorted and took care of the mail, just as other country postmasters do, and sat round and swapped tales with anybody who happened along. There wasn't much mail.

His little store failed, as so many things failed for him; years afterward a man from the government came round for him to settle up his accounts. He told Lincoln that they wanted to close up his affairs. The tall, gaunt form turned to a little old trunk in a corner of the bare room. The great, ungainly hands searched slowly until they found a small package, done up in an old cotton cloth. Slowly he untied it. It contained seventeen dollars. "There it is," said the gaunt and sad-faced man, "I never use any man's money but my own."

You think pretty well of country postmasters when you hear a story like that.

12

Letters in the Air

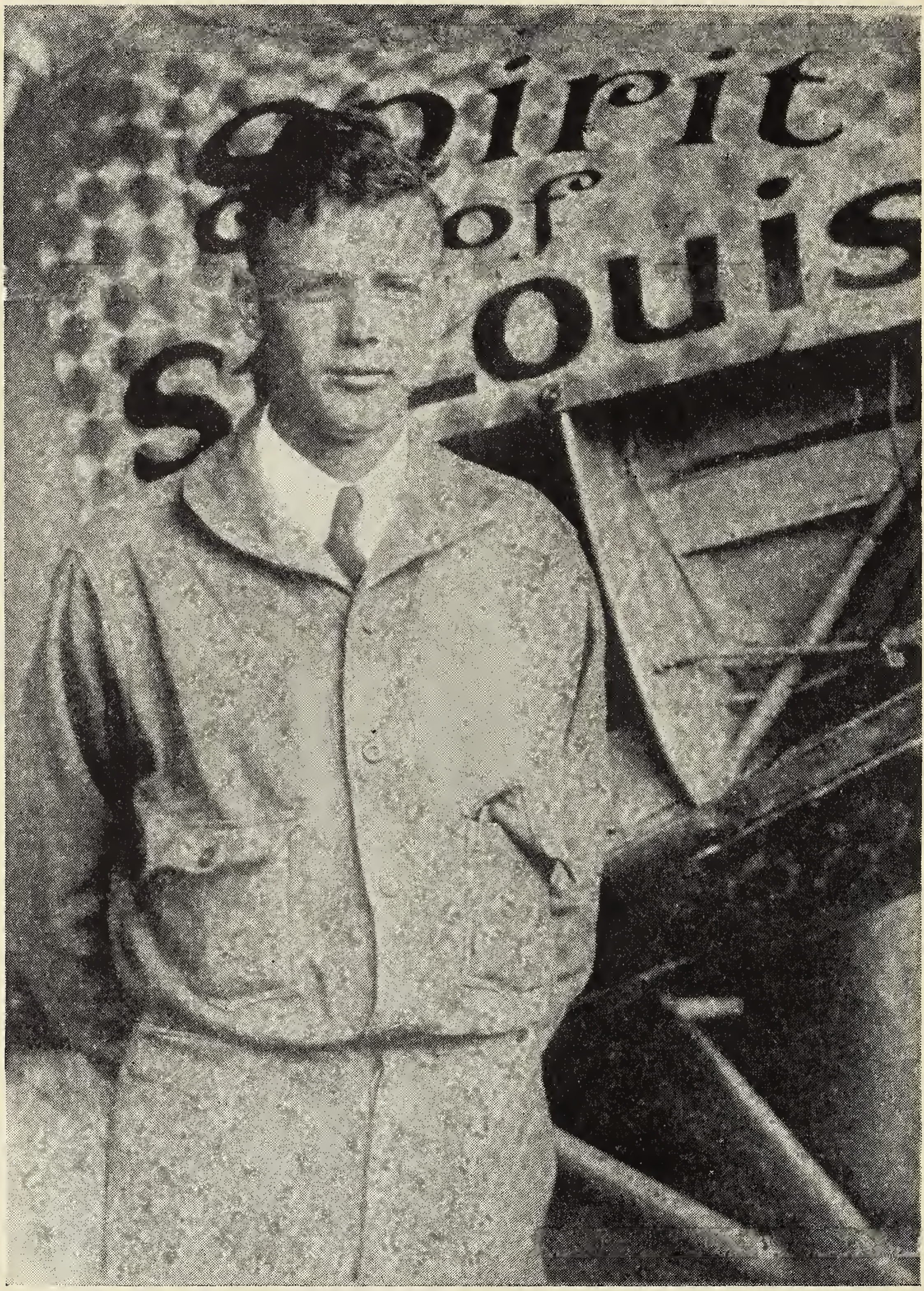
IT WAS Grahame-White, a famous English flyer, who first drew attention to the usefulness of the airplane as a carrier of mail. He had carried a bag of urgently consigned letters to an ocean liner as far back as 1910. It was only a distance of seven miles. But it seemed to prove to many that some day we might see mail carried in airplanes on regular schedules.

The next year, on the occasion of the coronation of King George V, Grahame-White undertook to deliver some 130,000 letters and cards of congratulation to the king, flying from Hendon to Windsor with them, and creating quite a little excitement over the experiment. This was a gesture of loyalty, rather than a real postal service. But it set many people thinking about the possibilities.

It was several years before anything further was done about it, either in England or America. For there was considerable doubt whether transportation by air could be made reliable enough to risk the mails in an airplane. The plane of that day was quite a different affair from the ones to which we are now accustomed. It was made of rods of white spruce or bamboo, braced with piano wire, and with wings covered with varnished muslin or silk. It could carry one passenger or a few hundred pounds of freight and make from eighty to a hundred miles an hour if the weather was good.

It was in May, 1918 that the Post Office Department determined to set up an experimental air service between Washington and Philadelphia. To indicate how little was known about travel by air, the post office people found that there was no such thing as a fund from which they could draw for air mail; they finally were forced to set aside money from a fund marked for "steamboat and other power-boat services." Of course, an airplane is, in a way, a "power-boat."

This experimental air line was to fly daily, the idea being that much time could be saved on mails between New York, New England, and the Southern States. As long as the weather was fairly good the planes could make the trip with reasonable regularity. When it stormed, they did not attempt to fly. The first plane, on the northbound trip, left



"We"

Colonel Lindbergh Was One of Our Early Air-mail Pilots.

Washington after impressive ceremonies, flew almost to Baltimore, a distance of about thirty miles, and had to land, forwarding the mail the rest of the way by railroad train. The southbound journey was more successful; it made the trip from Philadelphia to Washington in an hour and thirty-six minutes.

Today the modern mail airplane is quite different from the early planes. It is built of metal, and for long distances it is a large plane, carrying as many as twenty-five or more passengers and five thousand pounds of mail and express. These big planes attain as much as a speed of three hundred miles an hour, and make regular schedules of a hundred fifty to two hundred miles an hour.

In 1919, another air route was opened between Cleveland and Chicago, greatly shortening the mail schedule between New York and the West. In July of the same year, this service was extended to cover the gap between Cleveland and New York. The next year this service was extended westward, Chicago to Omaha, and in September, 1920, a line was opened from Omaha to San Francisco, with a schedule of fifty-four hours from New York to San Francisco.

All this required the establishment of landing fields and airports. With these in operation, the usefulness of air travel in a commercial way began to be felt. As the air-mail pilot seemed to take his job in much the same businesslike way as the postman who calls daily at your door, a new conception of the usefulness of flying began to enter people's minds.

People soon began to take a pride in sending their letters by air mail. The public also began to recognize that the air mail was doing the finest kind of pioneering, and air routes multiplied. In 1936, air lines in the United States flew 55,380,353 miles, carried over ten million pounds of mail, and four million pounds of express.

Beyond our own boundaries, regular schedules are maintained from Halifax and Montreal, Juneau, Ketchikan, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, and to Mexico City, Guatemala, and Panama. Down the west coast

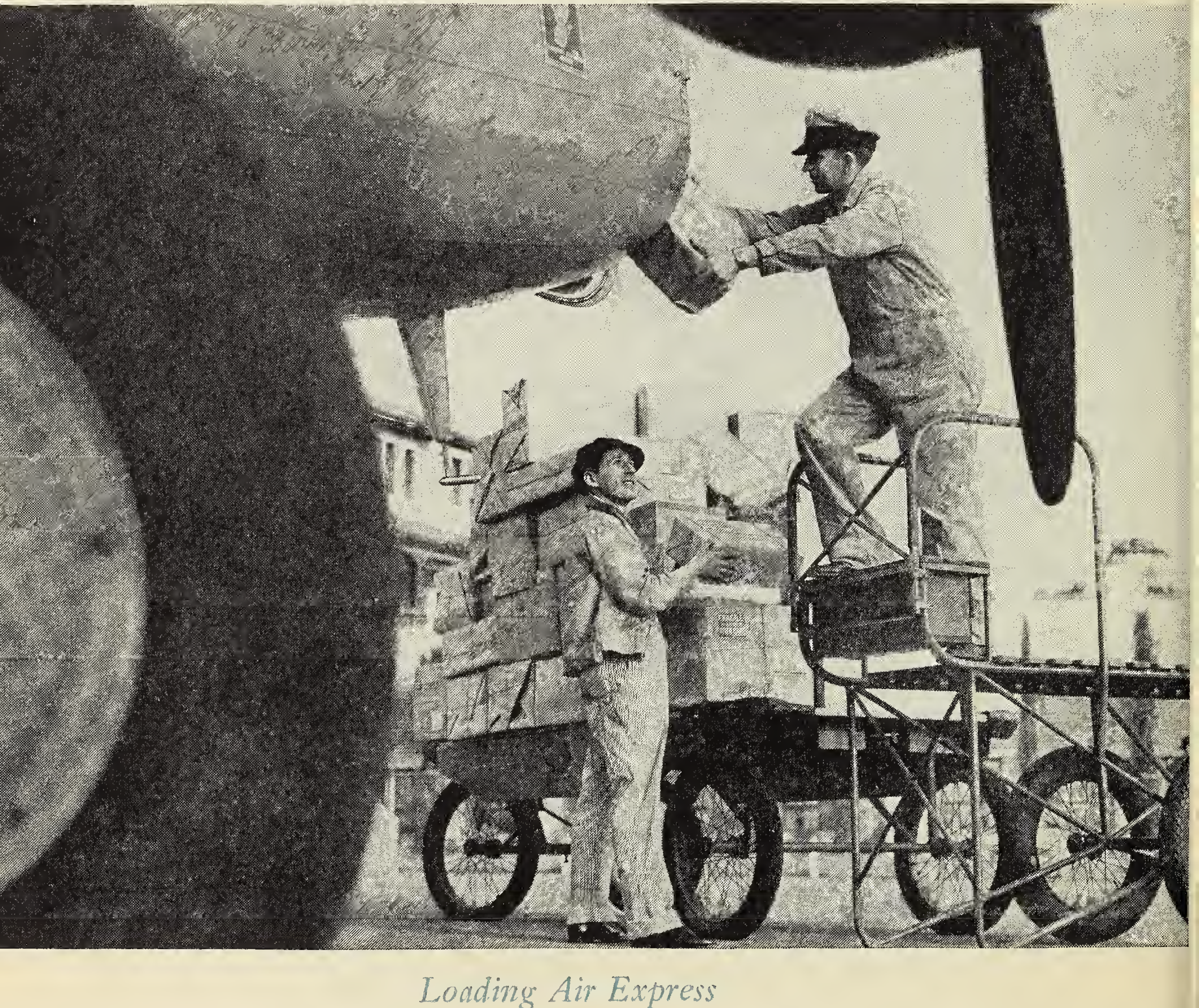
The China Clipper Passing Through the Golden Gate of South America the service extends to points in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. On the east coast, through Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and the lesser islands of the West Indies the mail goes on a regular triweekly schedule to Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires.

On October 7, 1936, the China Clipper inaugurated the first flight across the Pacific Ocean, opening a regular weekly service to Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines. The trip of eighty-two hundred miles is made in six days. Service from New York to Bermuda is now being set up; and the question of mail flying regularly between Europe and America across the Atlantic is being worked out in such a way that we may expect it to be established soon.

While all this advance has been made in the use of air mail in America, Europe has not been idle. England set up air-mail service across the Channel to Paris in 1919. The distance is not great; and the French have always been greatly interested in aviation. So it wasn't long before no less than five different air lines were in operation between Paris and London. These were later consolidated into the Imperial Airways, Ltd. This English air mail has grown until it extends almost around the earth. It goes to all the English dominions, with lines to Cairo and Bagdad, to Karachi, in India, to New Zealand, and to Australia. In South Africa, too, they have air mail; there are lines also from London to Malta, Egypt, and Palestine.

In France, too, air mail is in general use. The French have always been great flyers, having been the first to experiment with balloons, almost two hundred years ago. When Bleriot, the great French flyer, first flew across the English Channel in 1909, he marked out one of the first routes over which air mail was carried.

Like the English, the French take great pride in their colonies, and their line between Paris and Morocco was one of the first long-distance air routes in the world. This service to Morocco has since been extended by a line across the South Atlantic from Dakar to Brazil. The



Loading Air Express

French maintain air mail, too, between Paris and Berlin, Warsaw, Bucharest, and Constantinople.

In the West Indies and South America air mail has transformed the way of living. Cities that required weeks to get mail from New York or from Europe, now get it in a few days, while in our own country planes fly from the Atlantic to the Pacific between dusk and dawn.

Twenty-five years ago a courageous pilot attempted to fly from New York to Philadelphia. Such an attempt had never been made, and so daring was the exploit that the New York *Times* offered a prize of ten thousand dollars to the man who would do it. It took Mr. Hamilton, who won the prize, a whole day to make the round trip, ninety miles each way. Today mail planes make the trip each way hourly, taking only forty minutes for the journey. This remarkable development of the air mail is one of the wonders of our wonderful century. All honor to the men who have made possible the wonderful epic of *Letters via the Air!*

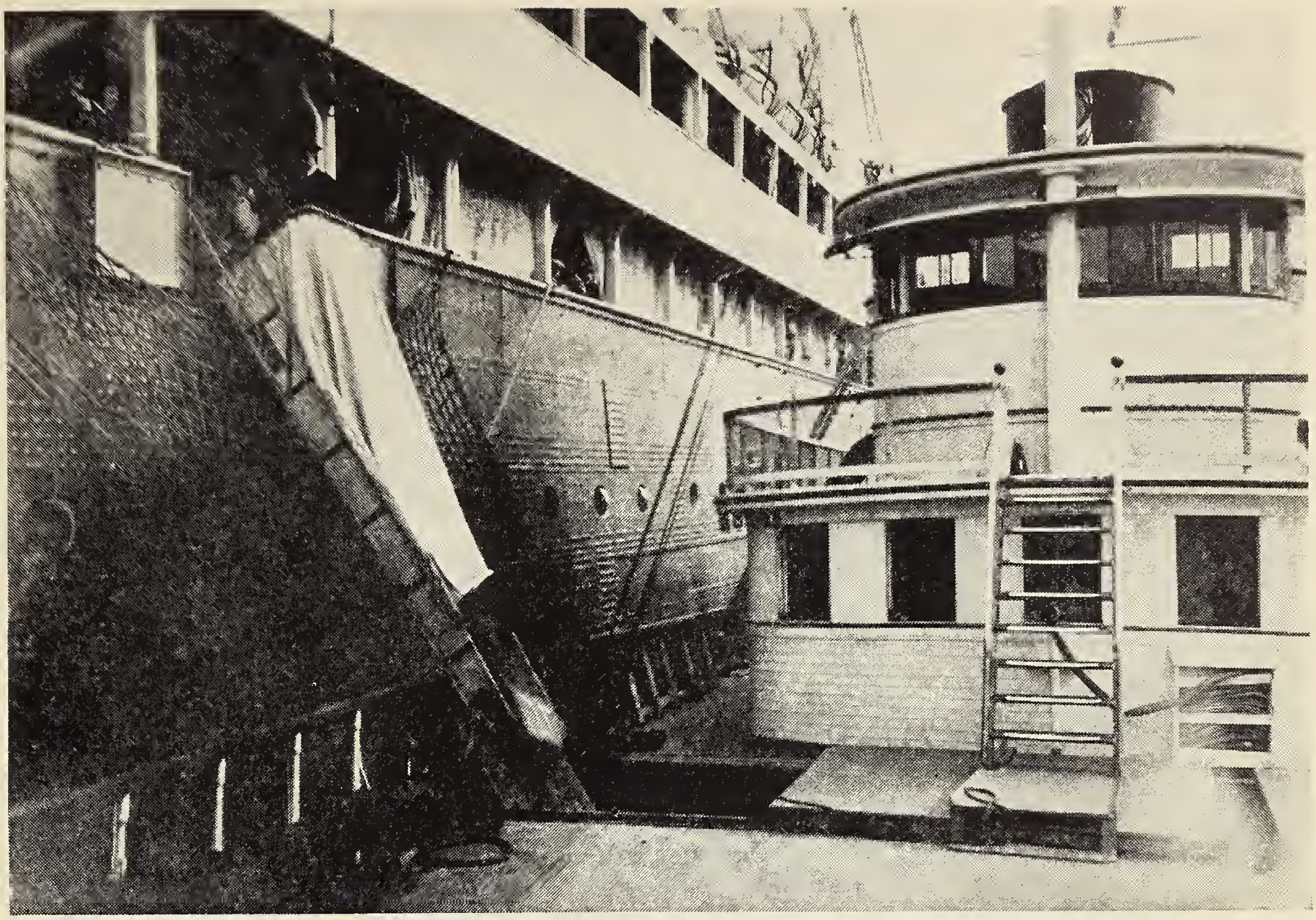
13

"Wherever He May Be Found"

ONE of the remarkable things about the post office is the certainty and accuracy with which it checks up our carelessness and looks after the ignorant errors of which we are guilty when we address our mail.

In the early days the postmaster marked the amount of postage to be charged on one corner of the address, and it was quite a matter of chance whether the letter would ever reach the person to whom it was addressed; or if it did, whether he would pay the required amount of postage for the privilege of hearing from the one who had written it.

Later, postage stamps having come into use, the postmaster drew a line with his pen across the face of the used stamp; or, if he had a



The Chute Used in Transferring Ocean Mail

taste for such things he had a stamp or die made, bearing the date and the name of his office. Even then, it was a bit uncertain whether the letter might go astray. Now the government furnishes him with dies, supplies of all kinds, even with cancelling machines to cancel the stamps, and surrounds the delivery of our mail with such care that seldom does a piece of it go astray.

The government, however, cannot wholly persuade us not to be careless and foolish about the way we address our mail. Sometimes we leave off the name of the state; sometimes we completely forget to address the envelope; sometimes we write the address so badly that only an expert can guess where or to whom the letter is to go.

When a mail clerk comes to a piece of mail like that, he places it in a pigeonhole marked *nixies*. That word means that the address is too much for him; that he can make "nix," or nothing, out of it. These "nixies" go to an expert who, in a large post office, does nothing but handle such mail day after day. What he cannot decipher is hardly worth mentioning. After he has had a try at it, if the address still remains a conundrum, it is sent to the Post Office Department at Washington, to be studied by their experts. If they can make nothing out of it, which is most unusual, it goes to the Dead Letter Office, there to remain until called for.

This seems to be a lot of trouble to take with a badly directed piece of mail, but an example or two will show you that some of the hard nuts given to the "nixies" are very hard indeed:

For instance, Benjamin Franklin, in the year 1728, founded a newspaper called the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Later the name was changed to *The Saturday Evening Post*. The date of its founding is still printed on its cover. A man in South America, who didn't know much about the United States, wanted to write to the *Post*. He didn't know much English, but he had a copy of the paper before him, so he wrote out what he thought would do; and this is what he put on his envelope:

Founded by Benjamin Franklin,
A. D. 1728,
U.S.A.

The post office sent it straight through to the people it was intended for.

Many people who live in foreign lands and speak another language than ours are not familiar with America. One of them, an Italian, wrote to Giovanni, his friend, who was in America. He thought that Chicago was in New York, so he wrote to Giovanni at

Chicago,
N. Y.

and lest that might not be enough, he added:

Dove si Trove

which means "*Wherever he may be found.*" Yes, wherever he may be found, the post office will follow and search for him.

One man, writing to a friend in Chicago, spelled it *Zi-za-zo.* Another one tried it, and wrote *Ja-ja-go.* Still a third one beat them all, with *Cha-chi-cho.* There being no street addresses, these all went to the Dead Letter Office. This is in Washington; thousands of letters and packages find their way there after the postal clerks have done all they can to figure out what the address means. They do wonders with them before they finally give up.

There are many ways in which addresses may be confused. For in-

U.S.
MAIL

stance, there are towns of the same name in many states; twenty-eight cities and towns named *Washington* are found in the United States and a number of others are know as Washington Court House, Washington Bridge, Washington's Crossing, Washington Heights. These are confusing to many people; they write down the wrong state, or no state at all, or forget to add Crossing, Depot, Grove, Mills, Park, or Square to the word Washington, and the postal experts are completely at a loss.

One way to avoid this difficulty is by using greater care in writing an address; another is to write your own name and address legibly, so that the misdirected mail may be returned to you.

One Day's Mail in the Dead Letter Office

14

The Little Town Under the Hill

ONCE there was a sleepy little town that nestled, cozy and comfortable, under a sloping hill. It was a lazy little town and didn't seem to care much about what went on in the world outside.

The village folks raised gardens where they grew tender corn, and crisp lettuces, and melons, and peas; they lived very well. Their hens laid the freshest and finest of eggs, and their cows gave rich, warm milk that foamed, so that every cat and kitten in that little town lived high. Above the village, on the sloping hill, were sheep. Their wool was long and soft. The women spun it and wove it into cloth, so that everyone was well dressed.

The people built their own houses and made their own shoes. Houses, clothes, food, and shoes—what more could any village ask?

Well, they asked the old, old thing! They said they never could be happy without it. They said that they were cut off from the world outside, and that clothing, shoes, fresh eggs, and foaming milk were as nothing if they couldn't hear from other folks, and send word to the outside world.

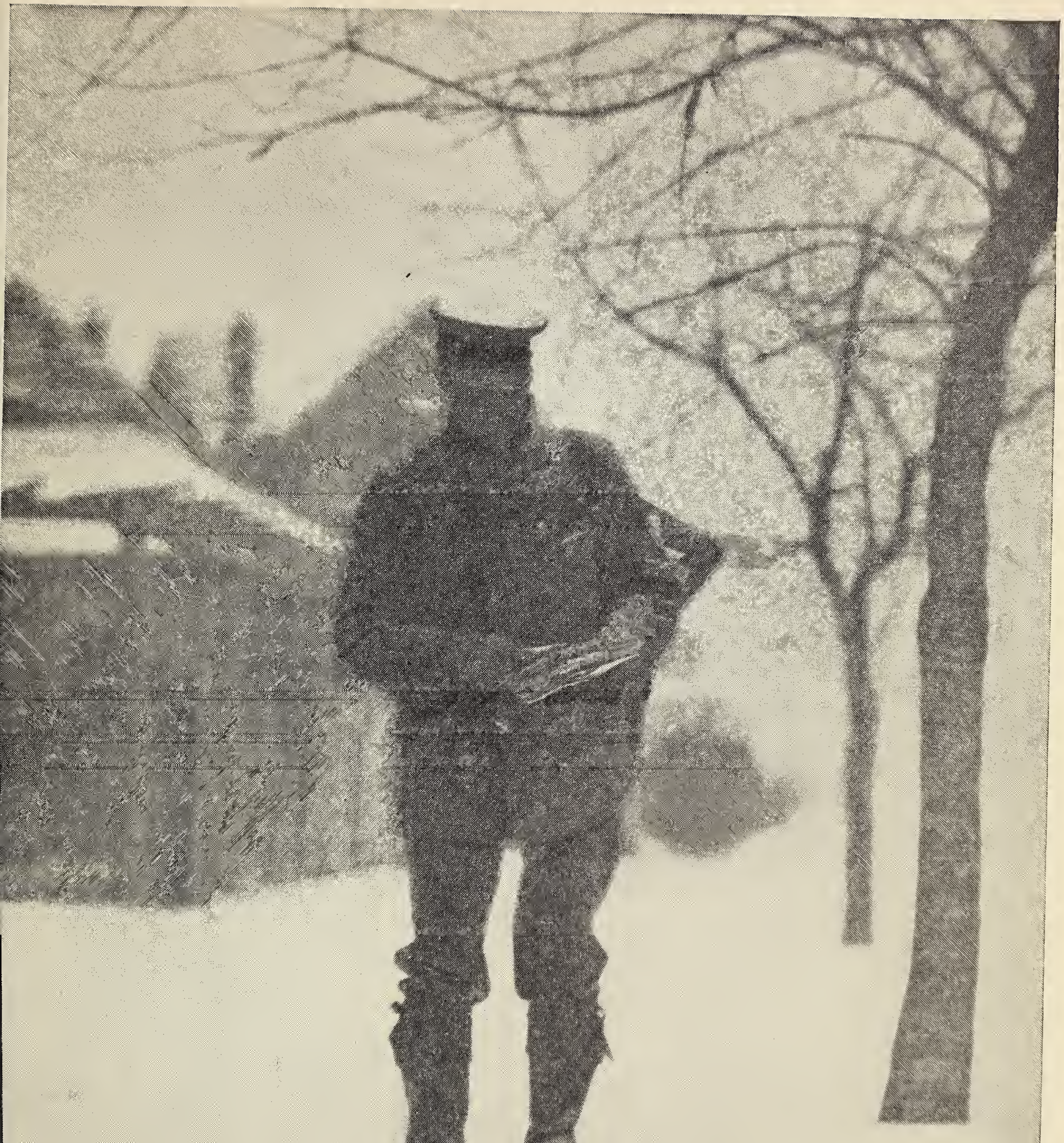
"We die!" they cried. "We die if we do not hear from the outer world!" It was a strange little village, if you stop to think, for it might have been almost any place at any time. It might be now—your own town or mine.

So it is that every town and city and every farm and hamlet must have a *road*, and every road must connect with *post offices* at which to post our news and hear from our friends. For we die if we do not feel the warm touch of other people and hear the rumblings of the world that lies beyond our sight.

Did you ever hear of Puck, the fairy sprite? In Shakespeare, you know, he says: "I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes."

Our mail men don't do that. But they're much more reliable than that mad spirit of misrule. Their girdle goes far to help us hear the smallest whisper of our neighbor and to tell us of his smallest need.

Some day, a thousand years from now, children will read about our lines of communication, and will smile, and say: "How strange! Those people lived way back in the beginning of things, when the mails moved slowly. They took a whole day to cross the continent, and a week to fly to the China Sea. How slow they were, and how little they knew—those people who lived way back in 1937!"



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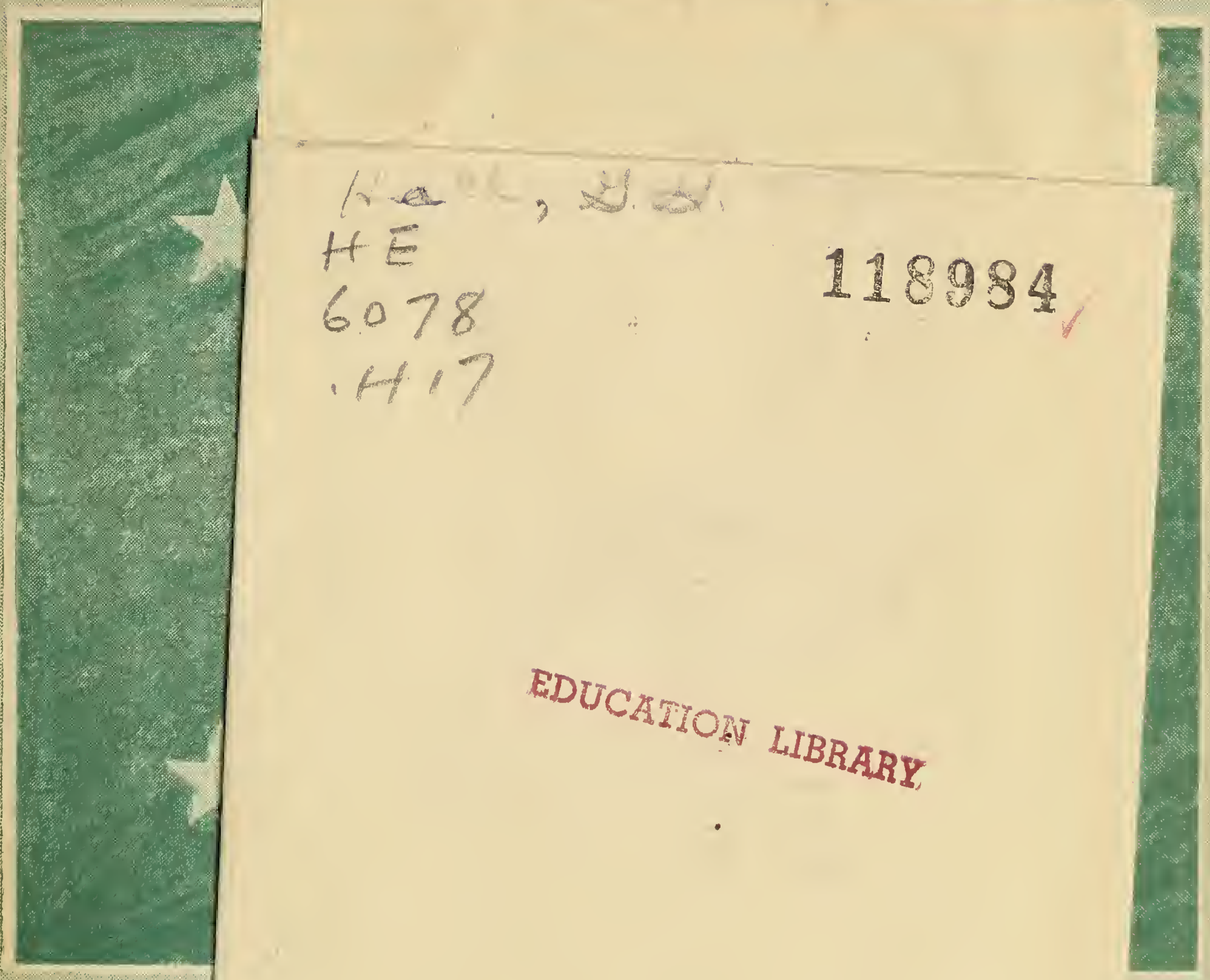

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